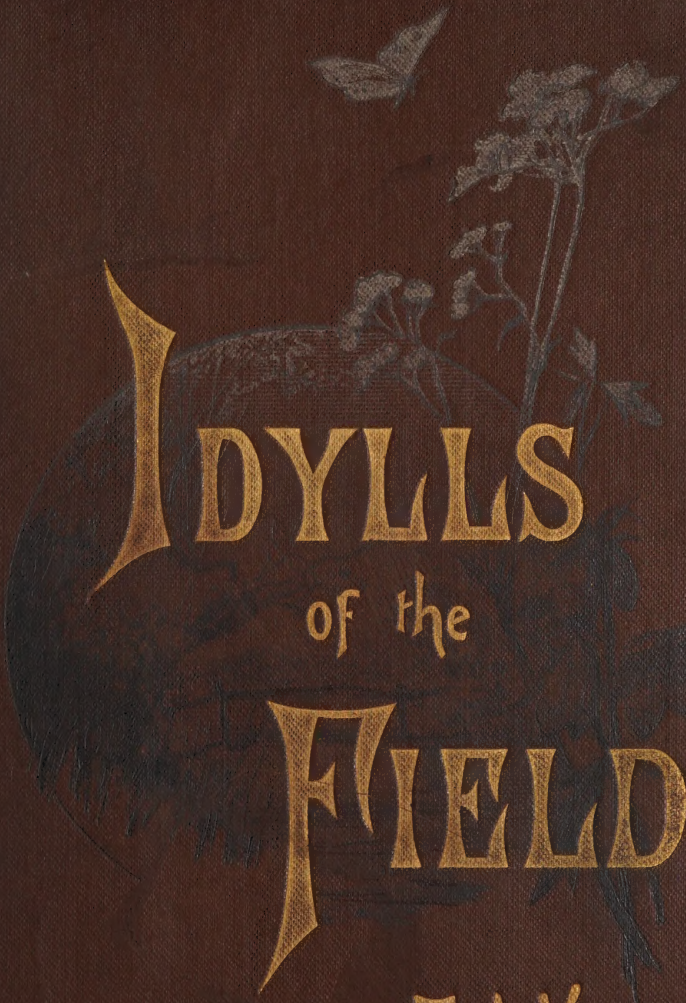
IDYLLS of the FIELD

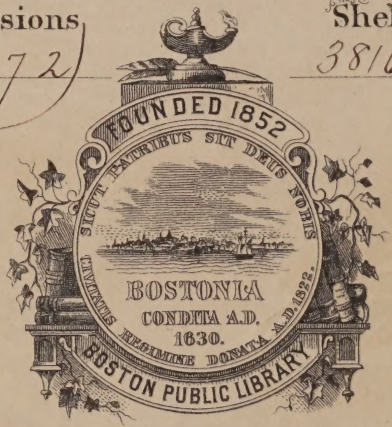


F. A. KNIGHT.

Illustrated by E. T. Compton

Accessions (7772)

Shelf No. 381.6.59



Received Nov. 26, 1889.

CAUTION

Do not write in this book or mark it with pen or pencil. Penalties are imposed by the Revised Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 208, Section 83.

B.P.L. FORM NO. 609: 5.4.27:250M.



Photogravure H. Rifflerth, Berlin.

CASTLES IN THE AIR

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

IDYLLS OF THE FIELD.

BY

FRANCIS A. KNIGHT,

AUTHOR OF 'BY LEAFY WAYS.'

ILLUSTRATED BY E. T. COMPTON.



LONDON:

ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1889.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

B.H.
(7772)
Nov. 26. 1889

TO

THOSE WHO HAVE FOUND PLEASURE BY 'LEAFY WAYS'

THESE PAPERS,

WHICH FIRST APPEARED IN THE *DAILY NEWS*,

Are Dedicated

BY

THE AUTHOR.

'Thanks for the sympathies that ye have shown!
Thanks for each kindly word, each silent token,
That teaches me, when seeming most alone,
Friends are around us, though no word be spoken.

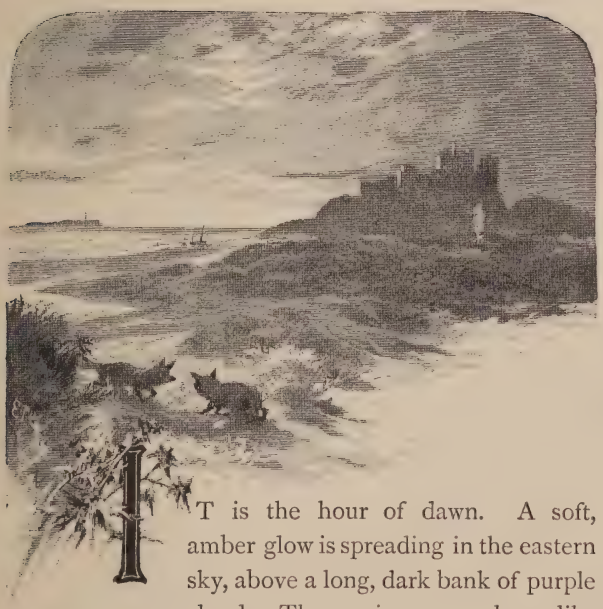
* * * * * *

'Therefore I hope, as no unwelcome guest,
At your warm fireside, when the lamps are lighted,
To have my place reserved among the rest,
Nor stand as one unsought and uninvited!'

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

	PAGE
A WINTRY DAWN	1
WINTER IN THE MARSHES	8
FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW	15
A SECRET OF THE HILLS	22
HERALDS OF THE SPRING	29
HIS ISLAND HOME	37
CASTLES IN THE AIR	44
MEADOWS OF ASPHODEL	51
WHEN ALL THE WORLD IS YOUNG	59
THE POSTERN GATE	66
AT THE BEND OF THE RIVER	76
THEIR FIRST APPEARANCE	84
THE GIFT OF SONG	92
A ROBBER STRONGHOLD	108
A SEA-BIRDS' HAUNT	116
FLOWER-DE-LUCE	120
CHEDDAR CLIFFS	125
IN THE HEART OF THE MOUNTAINS	132

A WINTRY DAWN.



IT is the hour of dawn. A soft, amber glow is spreading in the eastern sky, above a long, dark bank of purple cloud. The waning moon, hung like a broken ring of silver high in heaven, is bright against the pallid blue. Across the dark levels of the sea the 'wild white horses' are plunging in towards the sandy

shore that sweeps its winding miles far down the coast.

Cold and dark are the little islets whose grim rocks break the sky-line. Clear cut above the nearest stands out St. Cuthbert's Tower, whose massive masonry has weathered the rude blasts of ages. Boldly, too, upon the saffron sky rises the tall shaft of the famous light-house that for fifty years has been associated with the story of a woman's daring and devotion. There, too, still remain the old fire-beacons that even in this century threw their fitful glare across the waves.

The sands of yonder bay are strewn with the black skeletons of ships; round those cruel reefs a hundred gallant craft lie deep beneath the sea.

You may read the story of the coast among the houses of the hamlet. Here a gate is hung from a broken spar. There a battered figure-head lies by the cottage door. Yonder an old ship's bell hung in the entry startles the visitor with its sullen clang, as if in echo of the sound of doom, when rough billows dashed the iron tongue against the shuddering metal.

Cold and gloomy is the stonework of the great grim fortress that here, on the brink of the northern sea, rises above its skirts of black basalt, calm and defiant still as in the days when its garrison had naught to fear by land or sea save treachery within the gates. There is no sign of life about its towers and parapets, except the troop of daws that, with sharp and eager clamour, float round the massive keep, or alight on

the corroded guns of the ancient battery, or, perched in line along the battlements, plan the mischief of the morning.

On the sands below, a few oyster-catchers and a redshank or two wander up and down along the lines of weed that are left as the tide goes out, or explore the little heaps of foam that are lightly tossed this way and that by the wind. The gulls are mostly out at sea, or scattered over the fields inland, in company with curlews and plovers, who have left the frozen sands to forage in the furrows.

Suddenly, in a hollow among the sandhills, whose hoary sedges seem still whiter in this pallid light, there is a stir as of some moving animal. There is a hasty gallop of light feet, behind a ridge of sand, and then —a fox leaps lightly down upon the shore, joined half a second later by another, following in hot pursuit. Fine fellows they are, with their thick brushes tipped with white, and with a tinge of grey upon their winter coats. One behind the other they canter easily down to the edge of the water as if in hopes of picking up for breakfast some wounded teal or mallard that may have drifted in with the tide. They leap over a little promontory of rock, and disappear behind the sandhills. Here they come again, racing along side by side. Now they pause upon the sand, and turn and face each other, and leap, and dance, and snarl playfully, like two unthinking cubs, forgetful altogether of dignity and decorum. Now one turns and dashes off,

followed instantly by the other, and round and round they go, now in line, now side by side, as full of fun and as intent upon their game as if there were no hounds in the county, and a view halloa was a thing forgotten. But alas! they stop short; they hold their heads high and look round with eager suspicion. What is it? Did some rabbit watching the performance from his burrow involuntarily give a stamp of applause? Alas! no, it is the figure among the sandhills. They are gone, and the beach once more is empty and deserted.

Suddenly, as swift as thought, along the jagged edge of yonder purple cloud there flashes out a thin line of gold. Over it hovers a soft ethereal fan of light like the herald angel of the dawn. Broader grows the fringe of gold, swiftly running left and right along the cloudy heights, and reddening as it goes. Tiny cloudlets, unseen before, are touched with glowing fire, and float like attendant spirits clad in burnished gold. It is the gold of Paradise. No ore of earthly mine ever shone with lustre a hundredth part so fair.

Now the broadening glow has kindled into flame, glorious, dazzling, unsupportable. Now look again. Round and fair the sun has risen on the wakening world. And lo! the cold earth, as by the wand of a magician, is transfigured by its light. All the colour has gone out of the cloudbank that, but a few moments since, stood out against the glowing east a rampart as solid as the Alps. It is there still, but

the eye can scarcely trace its shadowy outline on the sky.

The sunlight brightens the low basaltic cliffs of the islands, whitens the surf that beats about their feet, glitters on the lighthouse windows like a phantom of their midnight glare.

The sea that was so cold and dark is shot with green and purple, while the wet sand shines like a very opal. Wandering sea-birds catch the light upon their shining wings. The dark plumage of a solitary cormorant—as still as if carved out of the basalt on which he stands, shines with added gloss as the sunlight glances on his dusky wings. Just beyond him a flock of pintails—the sea-pheasants of the fishermen, are making for the shore, diving as they drift along. Farther out a fleet of eider ducks ride lazily on the heaving waves.

There are few handsomer sea-fowl than the drake eider, but his mate is sober enough in her dress of brown. They breed yonder on the Farne Islands, but this is their southern limit. Shy as they are now, they lose their wildness altogether in the breeding season, as if the touch of St. Cuthbert's kindly hand were still a shield to them from harm. Other ducks too, widgeon, and mallard, and scaup, sail along in clouds far out at sea; now dark against the sky, now brightening like gleams of silver as the light falls upon their upturned wings.

Along the rocks inshore there flies a hooded crow

—a strange-looking bird in his suit of black and grey, like a dress of motley. He is a winter visitor to England for the most part, though found in summer in the sister kingdoms.

Yonder comes a long line of peewits, with that strange rhythmic beat of wing that distinguishes them afar off from rooks even when their speech or colouring does not betray them.

Here and there among them flies a curlew, and, close behind, a troop of golden plovers, uttering at times their musical call. How mournful, in the hush of night, sounds on lonely moors that plaintive cry! A note of terror, too, for to the Northumbrian peasant the birds are no other than the wandering spirits of Jews whose impious hands were laid upon our Lord.

And now, too, the great fortress wakens into life. Its cold stonework glows under the soft fingers of the young Aurora. On tower and turret streams the mellow light; it reddens the round arch of the postern, up whose time-worn steps the bold defenders in its last blockade retired before the onset of the Rose of York; it blazes on the gilded figures of the dial, glitters on the eastern windows, flashes among the claymores on the armoury wall. Even the ancient gun that tradition brought from a Spanish galleon, that in the flight of the Armada went to wrack out there among the islands, glimmers under its rusty coat as the sunshine glances on its battered metal.

But now the clock, like a wakeful sentinel, proclaims

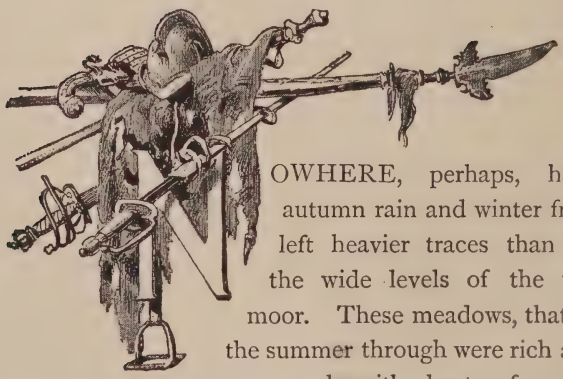
the hour. It is a mellow note, a calm and peaceful sound; and yet the daws, that but now were lining the long parapet, suddenly start up and circle round the stately keep, scared from their rest by the familiar clang. Does something in its tone recall that other note of fear that from the self-same throat sounds on wild nights to call the lifeboat crew to peril their lives upon the sea?

It is the hour of day. Sounds of labour have long been rising from the peaceful hamlet, and

> 'From the hundred chimneys of the village,
> Like the Afreet in the Arabian story,
> Smoky columns
> Tower aloft into the air of amber.'



WINTER IN THE MARSHES.



NOWHERE, perhaps, have autumn rain and winter frost left heavier traces than on the wide levels of the turf moor. These meadows, that all the summer through were rich and green, purple with sheets of orchis, and aflame with flower de luce, and dotted over with white plumes of cotton grass, like a touch of early snow, are brown and dreary wastes. Cold and dismal are the belts of marsh-land. Beaten down are all their tasselled sedges, while a few forlorn bulrushes lift gaunt and ragged heads among forests of their withered leaves.

In the patches of coppice, spared as yet by the

Vandal axe of the woodman, where the tangled thickets shelter many a shy bird that shrinks from the ways of man, where the boughs in summer are draped with woodbine, where the ground is dense with meadow-sweet and marestail, thick with clustering bracken and heavy with the breath of flowers—a few dead leaves rustle among tattered boughs, and all the rest is bare. The water-violet lights no more the sullen ditches with its peerless bloom; closed are the bright blue eyes of the forget-me-not; lost is all the perfume of the flowers.

The sedge-birds that wove their nests among the reeds; the warblers that hid their fragile habitations in the shelter of the grass, have vanished with the summer.

There are a few tenants still that linger in the marshes. The snipe lies close among the withered sedge, with whose streaks of brown and yellow her pencilled plumage harmonizes well; the moorhen shows now and then her red helmet as she steals softly through the thickets. The magpie comes home to roost in the coppice. The crow keeps watch over the country from his favourite elm. There is still the robin's cheery strain; and the song-thrush hails the wintry dawn with a burst of music that has all his heart in it; but in the dark days of winter the birds make little sign.

There is no flush of purple on these banks of ling, among whose tangled roots lie deep the lizard and the

snake until the sun shall rouse them from their winter sleep. The rushes still are green, but it is a cold and sullen tint.

There is a look of winter everywhere. The little rivers that wander idly through the meadows, swollen with long weeks of rain, have risen over their banks, and have changed the lower levels into wide lagoons. Lines of pollard willows, whose slender branches redden in the sinking sun, stand far out in the flood, and mark the course of unseen water-ways. Tops of hedges show here and there; solitary houses are islanded by the far-reaching water. So altered is the face of the country that one might almost fancy the flying years to have retraced their steps, and that this was once again the mere across whose moonlit waters the sad-eyed queens bore in their dusky barge the fallen hero to his rest.

Over all the land linger the memories of a bygone time. On the hills that fringe the wide expanse there is a picture-writing, plain to read, in which is written the story of the past. Every knoll that lifts its head above the moor, in those old days a point of vantage and a safe retreat, is seamed with ancient earthworks and crowned with barrows of the dead.

Under the briars and bracken of the copses that nestle in the hills are ruins of the Roman villas that once, among rich belts of vines and cornland, looked seaward from these sunny slopes. No step of man sounds now upon their ruined pavements. The timid

night-jar nestles in their shadows. The rabbit burrows undisturbed under the crumbling brickwork; the viper basks upon their broken stones.

The black mould of the moor is rich in memorials of still earlier date. The plough has clashed upon a rusted anchor of rude and primitive design; the spade has brought to light the black framework of an old canoe, of the same cut as the quaint craft that still bear home the hay along these ancient water-ways. Deep under the peat, whose slow, resistless growth covers up with broad brown mantle all the works of man, lies still the Abbot's Way, along whose mortised beams of oak the friars crossed the treacherous swamps on the business of the monastery. Traces of them still the moor men find among the ancient timbers—a signet wrought in gold, or a token stamped with the abbey arms.

Beyond that blue line of hills, just where two lazy rivers meet, stands the mound of Athelney. Among these primitive cottages are some so bent with age that, looking through the low doorway at the glimmering fire of peat, one may see in fancy still the Royal exile by the hearth; may hear

> The goodwife scold with kindling eye
> In good broad Somerset. And sigh
> And wish the tale were true.

And in the mist of that fatal summer morning eight centuries later, when the Royal horse swept the wreck of Monmouth's army from this very field, the trembling

fugitives sought shelter here beneath these low-browed eaves, too often, alas! in vain.

Still the plough turns up heavy bullets and corroded cannon-balls. Still on many a cottage wall there hang old arms that played a part in that fierce struggle. Now it is the broadsword of a Royal trooper; now the rusted rapier of a rebel captain; now a halberd of elaborate device bent with a last desperate blow struck for a hopeless cause. Still among these hamlets linger traditions of the fight; of the cruelties of the inhuman Kirke, of the judicial infamy of the unspeakable Jeffreys.

Among the ditches that cross the scene of conflict, in quiet pools screened with dark alder-trees and set round with fringing reeds, the teal finds safe retreat. Hard by, in summer-time, the shrike builds in a way-side thorn, and impales on its sharp points the mice and beetles of her larder. In the early days of autumn quail lie close among the stubble; and even a clutch of their broadly-painted eggs is not an unheard-of find among the summer clover.

Here, in the chill dawns of winter, long lines of mallard, bearing downward from their swift career, descend with a great rush upon the water, striking up a cloud of spray that hides them for a moment; or alighting perchance on an unexpected sheet of ice, they skim far along the glassy surface in helpless and comical confusion.

At times there drifts over the moor a wedge of

clangorous geese, making for the Channel, whose brown flood just shows among the ragged outlines of the sandhills that keep back the Severn Sea.

And on the long-disused decoys, or on the quiet ponds where many a lusty pike was netted for the Abbot's table, there is ever seen among the reeds the white forehead of the coot, or the restless figure of the little dabchick.

Or from the shore a water-rail starts up, the dark red of its beak and legs and the flicker of its white tail forming welcome points of relief on the dull brown of the reeds.

On the shore of a little creek, where once no doubt the barges of the abbey were moored alongside the barn, whose ancient gables peer through green waves of ivy, a drowned sheep has drifted in, and a troop of crows even now are gathering to the banquet.

In the flooded field beyond, the edge of the water is lined with the white figures of a flock of gulls; others are paddling leisurely this way or that, riding high on the cold grey ripples after the manner of their race. A heron, too, among them stands waiting soberly for any plunder that the wind may drift ashore.

The hour grows late; the light is failing fast. The eye can trace no longer the outline of the ancient barn The gnarled figures of the pollards grow dim and ghostlike in the gathering dusk.

Suddenly, from the old tower that from the hill-slope

looks down, unseen now in the darkness, although the leafage of its sheltering elms has long since fallen away, floats the faint music of the curfew bell. Through a rent in the grey clouds the moon shines out with sudden gleam. There is a touch of light on the wet stems of the willows; a cold glitter on the flooded fields; a touch of silver on the distant sea. Then, dark and cold, the night descends upon the wintry landscape.

FOOTPRINTS ON THE SNOW.

A SNOWSTORM in town is no doubt regarded for the most part by the order-loving citizen, remembering the worries that follow in its train, with anything but friendly eyes. He may tolerate it as long as he is in the country. He may, indeed, look out on the smooth lawn through windows that never rattle with the roar of London with something of pleasure in its sunlit beauty. He may even cheer his youngsters on to face with bold hearts the stinging missiles, in their hot conflict in the trampled snow, while old memories stir his pulses of the day when he, too, stood up to the fire of the enemy as coolly as the last hero at Maiwand.

But he turns away with a sigh, knowing that in the streets of the town the snow will stop the traffic, break down the wires, and turn every street into a sea of slush.

In town the snow to him is nothing but a nuisance. But in the open country, where long after it has fallen

it lies as pure and stainless as the raiment of the angels, the snow is the crowning glory of the winter.

Marvellous is the skill of the Frost Spirit; wonderful the foliage of the forests that under his magical fingers grow nightly on the frozen panes; priceless the pearls he strings upon the spider's web; exquisite the lacework with which he fringes grass, and fern, and tree.

But, with the snow, Nature transfigures all the landscape. At one sweep of her broad brush all the clumsy touches with which man has marred the beauty of the world are effaced. The ordered stiffness of the hedgerow, the even line of the highway, are softened down. The hills are rounded to a riper beauty. The fields lie smooth, and white, and fair—an unwritten page waiting as for the bold outlines of some new design.

What a wonder is there in its very fall! when all the air is filled with snow, carried this way and that, never with fixed purpose, never falling straight, but streaming down from the silent sky that everywhere is full of whirling snowflakes, with soft resistless touches hushing half the noises of the world.

How the wind drives headlong all the eddying crowd! Under the lee of the hedgerow filters through a powdery stream that fills the roadway with the mimic scenery of the Alps. The hedges are covered up, the way-marks disappear, the roads are blotted out, huge white mounds make new features in the landscape.

Alas! then, for the belated shepherd on the moor, seeking vainly to recover the lost track. When the wind seems like some cruel demon, buffeting, blinding, maddening, as by ways rendered unfamiliar with the drifts he plunges along helpless, hopeless; fainter and more faint, until at last there comes the awful moment when he can fight no longer, and he sinks powerless down, down into the soft and fatal depths. The drift sweeps over him. He is lost as surely as 'some strong swimmer in his agony' who sinks in mid-Atlantic among the boiling surge.

Wonderful, too, is the snow that falls in the still weather, fair and even; that with more deliberate touches, brushed by no rough wind away, loads with beauty all the bending trees. Snow that, unseen and unsuspected,

> . . . "had begun in the gloaming,
> And busily all the night,
> Had been heaping field and highway
> With a silence deep and white."
>
> "Every fir, and pine, and hemlock,
> Wore ermine too dear for an earl;
> And the poorest twig on the elm tree
> Was ridged inch-deep with pearl."

And then before the dawn was clear, ere yet the light of sunrise lent a rosy flush to the hills and hollows of the whitened world, how the creatures of the wild have hastened to trace their names upon the glittering surface!

Some beasts there are that never leave a footprint

in the snow. All the cold-hearted race of reptiles are asleep. The badger seldom stirs abroad in the depth of winter, sleeping out the barren hours among the grass and fern that he has heaped far in along his winding gallery.

But in the lane that wanders along the hillside you may find the footmarks of a score of creatures that have passed unseen, but have left behind them traces that betray their names as plainly as would the colour of their coats.

These broad marks, fringed with the print of long claws—quite different from this dog-track that passes near, wandering dog-like from side to side of the lane—tell how a fox went by here in the dawn. Look how he stopped at the gate—a familiar one no doubt to him, recalling many a successful foray among the poultry of the farm up yonder on the hill. It was not then, we may be sure, that a rabbit left these delicate footprints.

Bolder and firmer are these tracks of a hare. He leaves three marks only as he passes, for the forefeet come down so close together that no space divides their imprints. What a leisurely gallop it was! No horn to-day to hurry his pace; no bay of dog or view halloa quickened his pulses as he ambled across the road and out on the open hill.

Here under the hedge and all along the bank a mouse has left her tiny marks; now and then her tail has drawn a fine curve that makes a sort of flourish to

her name. There goes a squirrel scampering over the snow in full retreat to its fastness in the fir-trees that cluster about the old British earthworks on the crest of the hill. Many a dinner he and his clan have made among the cones, as the gnawed fragments that already strew the snow remain to testify.

A flock of starlings rise from the farther side of the field as the squirrel races past. Against the white background the plumage of the birds has quite a dingy effect, that seems to harmonize with their dejected look.

Days like these tell hard upon the children of the air. Deep snow means starvation to thousands, and of all the imprints made by hungry foragers none are so frequent as those left by industrious birds. Here have passed a party of tits, whose busy feet have cleared the snow from the ground in hope of chance provision underneath. Silent are they these hard days. Even the thrush is a-cold, and has little heart for the noble minstrelsy that of late has charmed our ears. Nothing can deter the robin, he is singing still; and high up in the blue heaven there is even now the music of a lark. Here, too, among a very maze of light feet, you may read how he has been walking on the snow. His long hind-claw points him plainly out among the common crowd of finch and bunting.

Here a ringdove has alighted; you will know him by the rounded pressure of his cushioned feet.

The rooks have left the print of their great claws all

over the field, where they have shovelled the snow away with their strong beaks to get at the grubs, not yet too safely frozen in from their attack.

Here is a strange foot-mark : the track of no common bird is this. Two toes only in front and two behind. Nothing but a woodpecker has left that mark, and from its small size it was not the more familiar green woodlander, but one of his rarer spotted cousins, whose shy ways and inconspicuous colouring keep them mostly hidden from the general eye. There is no record that one was ever seen along this lane ; but he has left his card here, plain enough.

There is the call of a partridge ; and yonder, far up the slope, there is a line of tiny figures moving over the crest of the hill, calling at intervals fainter and more faint as they gain the hollow on the farther side.

Game birds make strangely different tracks upon the snow. The hind-claw both of the pheasant and the partridge, raised as it is above the level of the rest, leaves little sign. The toes of the latter, partially united by a membrane, have a curious effect in a foot-print, almost suggestive of a swimming bird.

The great blackcock has a heavier foot. His hind-claw, too, is down almost on the same plane with the others ; and all the toes, before and behind, are serrated at the edge—a sort of comb round each claw.

The snow is generally too soft at first to show slight points of this sort, but when it is in the state to make

good snowballs, then, in the lanes on the edge of the coppice, in the clearings of the wood, its surface becomes as the pages of a great manuscript covered over with these picture writings. No aimless and uncertain marks are these; no Etruscan tongue to which no man knows the key, but the runes of the shy races that have their dwelling in the fields, a language that the lover of country sights and sounds has early learned to read.

A SECRET OF THE HILLS.

A COUNTRY lane, a rough and narrow way that wanders between high banks overgrown with briar and woodbine, whose opening buds give promise of returning spring, leads up to a ravine that runs into the heart of Mendip. High above the road meet the arms of stately elms that, held in close embrace by clinging ivy, wear a wealth of borrowed foliage that might suit the summer. Green and fair, too, are the ferns that fill the fissures in their rifted stems. About their knotted roots the snowdrops are already peering through the brown beds of leaves that the winds have heaped under the hedgerow.

Half hidden by the orchards farther on, where among the grey branches the oxeye sounds at intervals his ringing call, are the houses of a little hamlet, nestling close under the steep sides of the hollow. Their rugged walls, with quaint gable windows deep set under frowning brows of thatch, were old when news of the Armada passed along these hills.

Beyond the village the road enters the ravine, whose steep sides are covered thick with furze and bracken, through which bold crags of limestone, rough with rowan and wayfaring-tree, raise their rugged heads.

Along one side of the valley rises a wall of cliff, relieved by the dark foliage of stunted yews that have twisted their tough roots into the crevices, or by the now leafless branches of the white beam, on which linger still a few clusters of fruit that have escaped the keen eyes of the daws that nest among the ledges. Here, too, the bold kestrel finds a safe retreat, and from her eyrie in the windy steep looks down upon the few signs of life that stir below.

It is indeed a quiet spot. Few sounds disturb the stillness beyond the scream of a hawk, the cry of a solitary ouzel, or the chatter of a troop of daws.

It is hard to realize how brief a time has passed since this solitary glen was a scene of life and busy movement. But over the crest of the cliff the ground is seamed and broken with the old workings of the miners—of the men who

'poured to war from Mendip's sunless caves.'

It is not long, reckoning by years, since Nature drew her green veil over the heaps of refuse; but the industry that barely half a century ago employed the country side is now no more than a tradition.

Among the hills there linger older memories than these. The rabbits that burrow under the smooth

turf of the great encampment yonder, whose rampart of loose stones stands out against the sky, bring up to the light of day the coins and pottery, the flints and fibulæ, of two races of defenders.

But hidden away in dark recesses in this lonely gorge there are dim records that go back to the uncertain mist of a time long before these broad hill-tops became the hunting-ground of Saxon kings.

Here, close at hand, under a great archway in the living rock, a cavernous chamber runs deep into the hill. Its early explorers found skeletons beneath the floor in such numbers, and disposed with such orderly arrangement, as to show that the cave was anciently a place of burial. Rude flint implements discovered here suggest human occupation, but of far earlier date: the Cave Men were not so careful in the disposal of their dead. But whoever they were whose bones were laid in this dark chamber under the hill, no clue to their history remains. Their skeletons have long since crumbled into dust. Nothing now is left but a dim and dateless memory.

Farther up the ravine, screened from sight by the contour of the hill, is another cave—a retreat, perhaps, of the still earlier race. There is a hollow round the entrance that suggests the hand of man, while the great blocks of limestone that with rugged brows protect the low dark archway are themselves almost like the work of some Cyclopean architect. The deep wrinkles that frost and rain have graven in the rock

are green with ferns; the ivy and the briar hang graceful sprays over the entrance.

The cave is higher when the threshold is well passed, and soon the glimmer of the candles lights up a vaulted roof, fretted and ribbed and sculptured by the slow tools of unnumbered ages. Here on the soft black earth that covers all the floor of this the first great chamber, badgers have left their footprints, and perhaps even now are watching anxiously unseen. Farther on, the roof is dark with clusters of bats that, folded close within their leathern wings, hang motionless, all unconscious of intrusion. By what strange faculty do they mark the time and know the hour for sallying out into the twilight?

The stalactites that once in thousands glittered from the rock overhead have long been broken away, but the massive sculpture on the walls defies the puny hammer of the spoiler, and all the sides of the cavern are hung with strange and graceful figures moulded by the dripping water.

It is by a very labyrinth of passages that you reach the end of the cave. The first descent is by a shaft that yawns like a well in the rocky floor. It is the Giant's Stairs. There is no need of a rope. Even ladies have ventured down that dark abyss. When you have stuck a candle against the rock, look back a moment to watch the lights of your companions twinkling down the steep slope of the chamber and throwing fantastic shadows on the rocky wall. Now

slide gently down; there is good footing a few feet below. Thence through winding passages you make your slow way.

Now the narrow gallery is too low to stand upright in; now the cavern widens out into a spacious chamber hung with delicate draperies of stone. Then by a last descent, so steep and difficult that it was christened long ago the Chimney, you slip cautiously down, steadying yourself with knee and elbow, into the great hall at the end of the cavern.

Here plunges through a narrow rift a stream that has worn its way into the very heart of the hill. Here in rude lettering, half effaced by damp, explorers have left their names, sometimes with a friendly caution as to the right turning, for, in the multitude of branching galleries, to lose the way is easy.

It is not a pleasant experience when an uneasy sense of something wrong breaks on the minds of a party of cave-hunters. When remembered marks are missed, and a familiar passage is looked for in vain, men try to look unconcerned, but the dull candles light up a circle of serious faces.

Gloomy traditions start swiftly into memory, of men, lost in this very cave, who perished miserably in the dark; of the suspense of anxious friends, of the dismal duty of the search party.

Why does a bat choose this particular moment to brush past like a phantom, on its noiseless wings?

There is a moment of ominous silence, broken only

by the ceaseless drip of water and the far-off plash of the stream.

All the lights are put out except that carried by the leader of the party, who goes back alone to try and recover the lost clue. The others watch his light grow fainter and then vanish, and hear his footsteps die away along the gallery.

After a few minutes, which to their troubled souls seem ages, comes a shout that puts new heart into the listeners, and calls back an answering cheer. Candles are relit, a few steps are retraced, and all is well.

By-and-by appears in the distance a faint glimmer, like a star, far on in front. It is the light of day, doubly welcome after those brief moments of suspense.

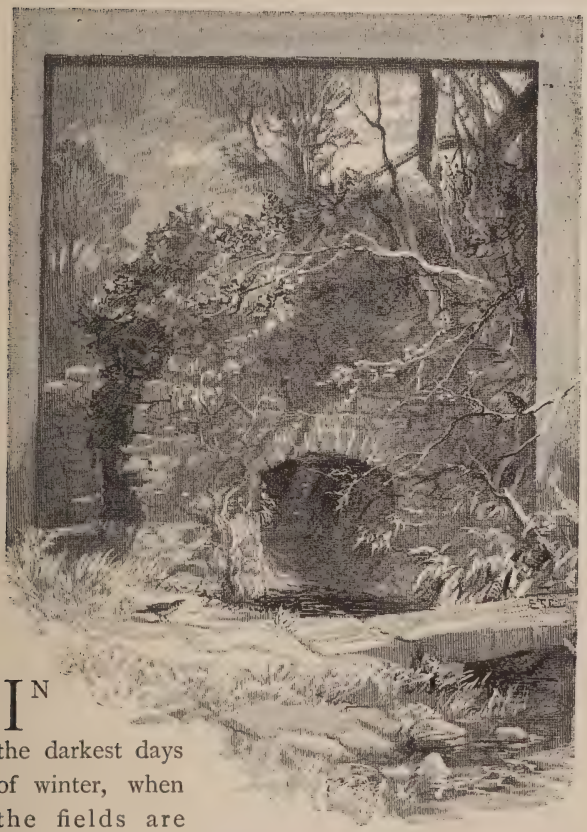
The old inhabitants, probably, seldom penetrated far into the interior. It is here, close to the entrance, that we must look for their traces. The cave men have left but little from which we can picture their way of life. In few but graphic touches is written the story of the race. About the red earth of their hearths we find no shards of pottery, no coloured beads, no weapons but the rudest instruments of flint.

There is nothing left of them but relics of the chase, a human skull here and there, rude carvings traced with knives of flint on cave bear-tooth or mammoth-tusk. They are a vanished race; there is no people that can call them kin.

The barrows that crown the hill-crest up yonder

were raised over the dust of heroes, who sought in vain to bar the path of the legions, or fell in battle with Ceawlin. Their story, too, remains untold; but they are men of yesterday compared with the wild figures that crouched round camp-fires lit among these rocks, who stalked the mammoth in the hollows of these ancient hills.

HERALDS OF THE SPRING.



IN the darkest days of winter, when the fields are brown and bare; when the woods are emptied of their beauty, and all the world seems dead; he

who will may read how life even then is stirring in the leaves; how the great heart of Nature never is at rest; how plain to feel, in all the stillness, is the beating of her mighty pulse. For even when the few last leaves are floating down through the chill December air their very death is a fluttering of life. The faded leaf is hurried to its fall by the swelling of the bud that will broaden into beauty in the spring.

Even when the days are shortest the willows tinge their golden branches with a purple flush, and the sprays of honeysuckle are studded with tufts of green. And when once the days begin to lengthen and February has begun, we find in lane and woodland the light footprints of the spring.

It is true they are but light. There is no denying that there are evil days in store; weeks of sullen skies and bitter weather, months of searching, biting, cruel wind. Returning winter may even cover all with snow.

But still with calm, unfaltering finger Nature writes on bank and hedgerow, day by day in plainer letters, the promise of the wakening of the world.

Everywhere the arum thrusts through the brown earth its folded green, and the ground ivy pushes out its long red stems as if feeling for the light. On upland fields, where the plough lies idle in the last furrow of the stubborn soil, the coltsfoot scatters broadcast its bright, leafless flowers. In sheltered hollows, where the untrimmed hedgerows lean over

with protecting arms, primroses have looked out with sweet pale faces all the winter through. A tiny speedwell here and there opens bright blue eyes to meet the sun, timid yet, and tearful, and soon discouraged, but gaining strength and beauty in the lengthening sunshine.

The cones of the great alder by the weir, that all the year have hung like sad coloured beads from every spray, are relieved by the fresher tint of opening catkins. The wash of the water has worn the earth away from the roots of the old tree and made a very jungle among the tangled fibres. Here the water-rail finds cover when the reeds are thinned and beaten down. Hither the moorhen hastens to find sanctuary, skilfully threading the winding channels of the weed; and then scrambling ashore, steals far in under the bank until the steps have died away along the lane.

No winter yet was known to freeze this pool. The springs that boil up through the sand far down in that great hollow, sending up now and then a stream of silvery bubbles, are beyond the reach of frost, and here in the hardest weather the mallard can always find a stretch of open water.

On the soft sands of the shallow streamlet farther down a whole tribe of water-loving creatures write in clear symbols their unlettered names. These tiny round footprints, neatly set in pairs, are the record of the vole. Those broad angular imprints are the cipher of the water-hen. This deep, deliberate stamp

is the seal of the heron, and everywhere across the yielding surface the slender feet of the wagtail have run in endless mazes. It is their special hunting-ground; year by year they hide their nest hard by in the ruins of the mill.

It is long since the plash of the wheel and the hum of rude machinery disturbed the silence of these quiet meadows. Eight long ages its pleasant murmur mingled with the music of the stream. We read of it in Domesday Book. The record is but brief: 'There is a mill paying five shillings.'

The village mill was a point of special notice in the old Norman survey. Scattered up and down its quaintly-written pages, together with the list of boors and slaves and villeins, of ploughs and vinelands, of forges and of fishponds, we find careful statements of the tax the miller paid.

We meet with varying assessments, from twenty shillings down to sixpence. Sometimes two adjacent hamlets joined at a mill. In one case 'two parts paying three shillings' belong to one, and 'a third part paying two shillings' to another village. On another page, 'half a mill' pays seven shillings and sixpence, the other 'half' nine shillings. In one instance half a mill is assessed at five shillings, but of the second half there is no trace discoverable.

It is not many years since the broken wheel was still lying in the ruins, but of the building itself little

trace remains. There is still the low archway under which flashed the water from the sluice. Still the stream pours down into the hollow where turned the ancient wheel, ever moistening with its scattered spray the bright green moss that clings about every stone of the loosened masonry, and the long fronds of hartstongue fringing all the crevices of the crumbling walls. Ages' growth of ivy drapes the remnant of a gable; tall elder-trees are rooted in the stones.

Along the stream that wanders away beyond the ruin the opening buds of the saxifrage are beginning to tinge the low green banks with their golden mist. Farther on, the snowdrops nestle under the bushes, growing tall and strong in the shelter of an ancient tree, or looking down on their white bells mirrored in the loitering stream. Among the hazels that lean over the brook swing the eager titmice—their clear and ringing notes the very bugles of advancing spring—and scatter from the fleecy catkins little showers of gold.

Even amid the stir of busy streets, the starling on the gable feels through his dusky coat a glow that makes him suddenly break off his odd and tuneless chatter to copy the pipe of the wryneck still far off in southern lands, or startle the listener with a stave of song so true that he looks up as half expecting, even now, to see a swallow 'swim into his ken.'

The robin in the wayside elm, a faithful minstrel

who has sung to us through the dark December days, now with blither strain, clearer and more confident as the days draw near that bring a fuller crimson to his breast, pours out his heart in bursts of happy song.

But chief of all, now, while still the year is young, sweetest perhaps before the brightening dawn, the song-thrush leads the chorus. No singer can surpass him. Not the blackbird, for all the full melody of his dulcet pipe; he is too brief, too wild, too careless altogether. Not even the skylark, for all the floods of delicious music that from his hover in the quiet sky he pours down upon the listening world. Nor can the very nightingale's brief months of music rank higher in our favour than the long, generous service of the faithful thrush.

He is ever a sweet musician; but at times there sounds among the crowd a burst of song from one more tuneful than his fellows that stays the passing steps to listen, and year by year draws new lingerers about his haunt.

In a quiet corner of the wood yonder, a great singer keeps his court.

Cross the soft ground beneath the trees, where the brown earth is breaking into points of green, and where patches of bright moss hush the sound of passing footsteps. Follow the faint path that winds among the trees, plainer now for the rich heaps turned up by some restless mole; rustle among the deep

autumn leaves, still glorious in their ruin, where, not yet hidden in the green tide that ere long will rise among the trees, lie broken boughs torn away by the winds of winter from the great roof overhead, and now wrapped about by the soft grey-green of delicate lichens, like rare growths of coral, whose exquisite touch renders the fallen monarch of the forest still more beautiful in death.

Now a sudden gleam of sunshine, breaking through the clouds that bar the saffron sky, brightens the grass that skirts the wood. Now it lingers on the stems of the great oaks that but a moment since stood cold, and bare, and sullen. It leaves them glowing with its soft caress, catches a hundred points of scattered light on polished beech-bark and on shining ivy-leaf, and transfigures all the woodland with its glory.

And then, in the corner at the foot of the slope where the wild branches of the clustering elms make ever a half-twilight under the brightest noon; where wandering sprays of briar and tangled trails of woodbine canopy the way the chief of singers answers to the call.

High up in the branches of the beech, that among the ranks of elm-trees stands alone, its dry leaves reddening all the woodland round, the thrush is sitting, a mere dark speck against the glowing west. But from his swelling throat there falls such a flood of music, stealing up the slope, reaching far among

the tall pillars of the glade, through the solemn stillness of the woodland, at the quiet hour—

> Just ere the brooding Twilight
> Unfolds her starry wings,
> And worn hearts bless with tenderness
> The peace that evetide brings—

as proves him sovereign by right divine.

HIS ISLAND HOME.

A STORMY day inland is to the birds for the most part a season of discomfort. It drives them from their haunts in the open to the covert of the hedgerow, to the shelter of the ivy, or to holes beneath the eaves.

The missel-thrush, indeed—a bold-hearted bird that will buffet the hawk who ventures too near his nest, and drive off a marauding crow—cares little for the weather. He really seems to revel in the storm, and his wild song rises all the higher when a fierce wind is blowing and the rain drives in sheets across the dreary landscape.

But stormy weather by the sea is quite another thing. Days like these bring in the gulls and divers from the open; for although seabirds seem to take pleasure in fighting with the wind, and to be most in their element when they face the wild weather, yet there are times when even they are forced to take refuge by the shore; when they even fly far inland to peaceful havens on quiet lakes and rivers.

Farther than that they cannot go: no tree can shelter them; their feet have no power to grasp the branches. They must fight it out, and face the blast, however hard it blows.

Life by the shore is at all times more variable than among the fields and lanes. In the country there is always a certain settled population, independently of the migrants who come home to build their nests in summer and the shivering fugitives who in winter are driven from the frozen north. But there are parts of the coast where in calm weather few birds are visible at all during the hours of daylight. There are times when you may wander by the sea with no birds in sight, except a wandering gull that, far off upon the waves, shows for a moment like the surf, or a cloud of ducks that, in even line, fly low along the water far from land.

But when the sun is well down in the west, when the dull mud-flats begin to take colour from the sky, then the life of the shore seems suddenly to waken.

A hundred yards in front of you, as you stroll along the edge of the tide, a flock of sandpipers are scattered on the wet sand. Now the swift wave flows about their feet, then retires again, while the active little birds run to and fro picking up the tiny morsels that the tide has brought them.

As you draw nearer, one of the little company with plaintive cry takes wing, then another, and then all at once the whole troop rise and fly straight out over the

sea. Turning shorewards now, on rapid wings, they alight again far down the beach where the eye no longer can make out their graceful forms.

Across the sky overhead, with long beaks plainly visible, and uttering now and then a plaintive call, floats a line of curlews. Now they open out in skirmishing order, and settle on a bank of sand that the sea is leaving bare.

As the dusk grows deeper, a flock of purres and plovers, that your hushed footfalls on the sand have not disturbed, rise suddenly unseen from every side at once, and all the air is full of cries and rushing wings.

That long trill is the call of an oystercatcher, wandering somewhere among the fringe of weed round the great rock by the river, whose rugged mass is now a mere shadow on the sky. The oystercatcher is native here, but many of the tenants of the shore are nomads, and as spring draws near will vanish some moonlight night, and, disbanding by the shores of northern seas, or in the solitude of Siberian moors, will spend the months of summer far from here.

Then as the dunlins go, a few terns may pay us a visit for a week or two on their homeward way, and delight our eyes with their graceful evolutions.

Many callers put into the bay as the year goes round. Hard days in winter may bring a flock of Brent geese into the river, sometimes even a herd of swans. Now and then from rocky haunts on the

opposite coast appears a cormorant. More rarely still a diver will spend a day or two among the sprat-nets, astonishing the fishermen with his amazing powers of staying under water.

The face of Nature, ever fair and young, is fresher still and fairer in the light of dawn; and none can know it better than the man who, from his boat on the river, has watched the young light breaking in the east; who has seen the dim outlines of the hills take shape against the sky—the broad shoulders of Mendip rank behind rank far down their winding line; has watched the mist clear off the moorland, and the blue smoke of scattered hamlets rise among the sheltering trees.

Drifting down the tide with idle oar, he comes suddenly on a creek by the river where, all night long, a grey old heron has watched and waited by the shifting sea. The startled bird, with muttered croak, draws in his long neck, spreads his great wings, stretches out his awkward legs, and with slow, deliberate flight makes for his home among the hills.

Over one of the ditches of the level fields that fringe the banks a kingfisher is hovering, poised above the water like a hawk. The sun flashes on his bright plumage as he swoops down now and then to reappear fifty yards farther on.

From the feeding-grounds on shore mallard and widgeon are hurrying to the sea. Here comes a string of teal that, leaving the moorland ditches where all

the night they have been foraging in the darkness, follow now the windings of the river, their flying figures dark upon the sunlit sky. They quicken their pace a little as they pass overhead, although the watchful figure in the boat makes no movement to disturb them. They have passed the rock ; they have gained the open sea.

Suddenly, from the brow of the long cliff whose rocky barrier stretches far out into the bay, sweeps down a bird. By his powerful flight and the bold markings of his plumage you will know him well. It is a peregrine ; and the frightened teal, too, know well the rush of those terrible wings.

They make a desperate effort to sheer off and beat out from the shore ; but it is too late. The keen-eyed falcon has marked his bird. There is a scream ; a little cloud of feathers that float upon the air, and then, with laboured flight, the peregrine with his booty in his clutches turns seaward too, in the track of the vanished teal.

It is a safe retreat to which the robber bears his prey. Straight up from the water rise the rugged cliffs, their seagirt steep whitened by the shingle of a single landing-place—elsewhere an unbroken wall that many a time in bygone days has made the little islet a safe refuge from pursuit.

Here it was that Gildas spent seven years of solitude among the birds who shared with him his lonely rock, until the rude manners of the Orcadian

sea-rovers drove him to seek shelter in the halls of Glastonbury.

Here, too, a century later, the pirate fleet, beaten off from the mainland further on by the bold Somersetshire yeomen, put in for breathing-space, and, reduced to dire extremity by their resolute opponents, were fain to cut their way through as best they might, and withdraw their shattered powers to harry some remoter shore.

Here it was that Githa, after that sorrowful search on the red grass of Senlac, stayed awhile with her train —mourning like her for the harvest of that stubborn field.

Here, too, in a fitting spot, a little colony of monks escaping from the world found a solitude in which, like a band of mason bees, they built their simple cells.

The spade of the labourer has found far under the surface here the fragment of a wall, there a little group of nameless graves. All else has vanished.

From monkish times may date, perhaps, the wild peony, whose red petals still, in spite of ruthless botanists, tinge the stunted grass. No other trace recalls the faded memories of this sea-girt rock.

From the windy steep, whence Githa looked seaward with sad eyes for the white sails that were to bear her far from home, frown the grim guns of the battery, whose handful of artillerymen seems almost to accentuate the solitude.

The stillness now is broken but by the scream of the falcon flying to his fastness, or the clamour of the gulls that wheel idly over the sea. The pirates that to-day find shelter here are the raven and the peregrine. Sea-lavender and cistus bloom above the buried ruins of the priory, and the scented clusters of the thyme wander over long-forgotten graves.

CÁSTLES IN THE AIR.

THE winds of March have passed into a proverb. There is no time in all the year when the cruel east blows with keener and more pitiless breath. Spring is in her most capricious mood. She is indeed a wayward damsel at her best. Year by year we watch her smile turn swiftly to a frown; we upbraid her for a jilt and a deceiver; we swear that her vaunted graces are nothing but a fraud.

But she has, even in March, her moods of sweetness. Right royal favours, after all, are her days of genial sunshine, when the vanes veer idly to the westward, and the air is almost still; when the long-silent birds find voice again, when butterflies begin to stir abroad, and the bees are busy gilding their brown coats in the wide crocus blooms.

The bitter memories are nothing to us then. Who could doubt when looking at a face so fair? Surely no malice underlies that kindly smile. Yes, it is a hard experience; it is long ere we wholly learn the lesson of distrust.

But March for once has had more in it of westward than of east, after all; no bitter winds have chilled the generous sunshine of the lengthening days.

Under its influence benign the purple blossoms jewel all the branches of the elms, a mist of green is gathering in the thickets, the blue-bell leaves are springing in the underwood.

Under every hedgerow the celandine spreads its petals to the utmost, as if to gather from the sunlight an added touch of gold.

There are speedwells by the wayside; there are primroses in the copse. Stray violets begin to scent the lanes, and the fair faces of the wood anemones are peering through the deep, dead leaves.

Everywhere the birds are busy. On the housetop sits the chattering starling, his half-finished nest in the gable beneath him abandoned for the moment; while in his own quaint way he gives utterance to the love that stirs his pulses.

In the warm sun the chaffinch sings, with hardly a pause between the endless verses of his simple ballad.

A sober hedge-sparrow, creeping mouse-like through the bushes, searching the leaves for snail or insect, looks up from his work now and then, and sings with all his might; or, as his mate draws near, lowers his voice until the listener can hardly catch the notes of the tender little love-song that he whispers in her ear, as if jealous lest some idle mischief-maker strolling by should overhear him, and mock the story of his love.

Farther down the hedge there sits another pair of lovers—two blue tits in their bright spring dress, now circling round each other, now chattering softly, now fluttering a little way into the air, and now flying off in company to see if the old hole in the ruined wall yonder, where the ivy hangs its friendly veil before the door, is vacant again this season.

Overhead a lark is singing, not with the full flood of melody that later in the year will charm us with its magical music, but with sweet snatches of most exquisite song; and as he sinks downward to the wintry fields again, another rises, and follows with a few bars at least of that strain that, heard under unfamiliar skies, has roused, in the softened hearts of rugged settlers, long-buried memories of home and childhood.

The songs of birds are to them the prelude of the little drama of their lives that, each returning spring, is acted and reacted in the greenwood, in the meadow, by the sea, by masters of the art.

Still, through the opening scenes the music lingers, rising higher, sweeter, clearer ere its close, when the long vigil of the mother bird is ended, and when she and her mate have time for nothing but to minister to the needs of their little family of gaping, goggle-eyed, naked nestlings.

We watch the old birds carrying food; we hear the querulous voices of their young, but we see comparatively little of their domestic arrangements.

Sometimes the nest is hidden away from sight altogether, in a hole in an overhanging bank, or deep in a crevice in the wall.

Some birds, again, conceal their nests by skilfully harmonizing the materials with the surroundings.

A wonderful charm there is in looking on as the work progresses, to watch the creeper glide up the rugged bark of the tall elm with a feather fluttering in her beak, and disappear behind the knotted ivy stems that hold her cosy nest; to see the starling carry his untidy odds and ends into the woodpecker's hole in the walnut-tree; to watch the woodpecker himself, the rightful owner, venture near now and then to look on with unmistakable signs of indignation.

But conspicuous now among the busy throng are the rooks, and loud above the notes of shyer builders rises the clamour of the rookery.

The magpie and the crow, birds of the same outlawed clan, are as shy in their building work as they are in other ways. They choose the darkest corner of the wood, the most solitary clump of trees, the tallest elm on the farm; and it is as hard to watch them at their work as it is to stalk them in the open.

But it is quite otherwise with the rook. It is no uncommon thing to find among the busy streets of a town a row of elms where the great ungainly birds build with perfect confidence their huge nests, and sit, and wrangle, and make love, careless of the roar of traffic, and all unconscious of the passers-by.

High up in the rocking tops all day the birds are working, repairing a foundation here, making good a breach there, now putting fresh touches to the lining.

Every moment arrives a party of foragers, greeted with new clamour from their friends at home, who recognise far-off their mates among the dusky crowd.

Wheeling on broad wings across the wind that drives the white clouds fast across the pale blue overhead, the great birds bring home their plunder.

Here comes one grasping in his beak a stick so long and heavy that he can scarcely reach his nest. Another carries to his mate a seed-potato plundered from some newly-planted field.

The solemn caws of dignified citizens mingle with the sharper clamour of irreverent youth; some are hoarse from age or temper; while one bird, whose vocal organs have perhaps been damaged in that baptism of fire that yearly waits the hapless young, utters a cry like the shriek of a sea-gull.

There seems to be the slenderest idea of the rights of property among the members of the commonwealth.

Now one bird, leaving his own nest where he has been honestly at work for the last ten minutes, sidles up to another—the property, probably, of a newly-married pair who have yet to learn the ways of their friends and neighbours—seizes a handful of the lining that has taken so much trouble to collect, and then scrambles off across the branches to make use of his ill-gotten gains in his own abode. And when one of

the aggrieved couple returns, and makes an effort to protect his property, the impudent thief actually buffets him off and helps himself to another handful.

There is no honour among these thieves, and that is the reason, no doubt, why so many nests are guarded by one owner while the other is foraging abroad.

Sometimes three or four pirates will put their dark heads together and make a sudden descent on even a guarded nest, driving the owner, dismayed by the odds against him, off in headlong flight, and then coolly help themselves to any handy sticks that may take their fancy.

Quarrels of this kind are not conducted in silence, and there is a good deal of plain language when a nest is approached, whether with peaceable intentions or not, by those who are not on visiting terms with the tenants.

It is a peaceful spot the birds have chosen for their home. One is tempted to fancy that these stately elms, screening with sheltering arms the old church that nestles close under the shadow of the hill, were standing here, in the pride of youth and beauty, when the ill news travelled fast across the marshes, from the low blue hills to the eastward, that the bolt had fallen at last, and that the glory of the great abbey had departed.

The knoll above is crowned by the ramparts of a Celtic camp. Traditions of King Arthur's time peopled the fortress with a race of giants. Stray hand-

fuls of coins found from time to time among the earth-works on its summit, the rusted arms of Dane and Saxon turned up among the rich black earth of the meadows at its foot, are clearer evidence that the Eagle and the Raven folded here for a space their conquering wings.

Here round the ancient tower the rooks find safe asylum. As the sun sinks in the west, the black-coated citizens gather in the tree-tops, and talk in hushed and solemn tones, as if the clamour of the day-light were a thing to be forgotten.

Through the western windows of the church the light of sunset falls like a glory round the kneeling figure of a long-forgotten cavalier.

There, week by week, the sounds of that labour that knows no day of rest are heard in the pauses of the hymn; while at times, above the Babel in the tree-tops, rises the loud twitter of a nuthatch or the shrill cry of a restless starling.

The sun is down. The far-off hills are growing cold and dark; the silver of the sea is changing into sullen gray; the mist that rises from the marsh-land gathers round the hill like the waters of a silent sea.

Suddenly, from his retreat in a hollow elm near by, flies out an owl, and on noiseless wings flits like a phantom across the darkening graves. He has vanished in the dusk; but, as the night settles softly down among the clustering trees, there sounds along the hill at intervals his mournful, mellow call.

MEADOWS OF ASPHODEL.



THE month of March, with its broken sunshine and its windy skies, has brightened the lanes and meadows with touches of that colour that, under the warmer sun of April, will broaden now from week to week until it ripens into the flowery prime of May.

From far southern lands come back the wandering birds. The swallow, lost to us so long, seeks again the haunts of her youth. All day long the chiff-chaff is telling to the children of the wood the news of her return; and on every hand, in field and hedge-row, fresh plants are opening to the sun.

Some flowers there are whose colour lends but little to the scene. Small, or few in number, or quiet in their tone, the world will pass them by unnoticed.

The ladies'-tresses that shyly lifts its fragrant spike of green among the tall grasses on the hill, the orchis, whose marvellous flowers cling to the stem like clustering bees, might almost 'look away and never be missed' save by the lover of Nature, who knows them well.

Other flowers again make themselves a part of the very landscape.

Such are even the daisies scattered broadcast over the April fields, and gathering thick upon the slopes like patches of drifted snow. Such are the bluebells that make a purple cloud among the copses. Such, too, the buttercups that tinge with gold the mowing grass. Such the warm crocus blooms, that flush the autumn meadows like a twilight mist touched with the fire of sunset.

As bold in colouring as any, and doubly welcome now ere the full noon of spring, are 'the daffodils that come before the swallow dares,' and with their generous wealth set all the fields aflame.

Now in countless thousands rise the pale green leaves; acres of broad pasture-land are glowing with the yellow blooms.

For centuries, no doubt, these meadows have worn each year this crowning glory of the wild March weather.

For centuries the children of the hamlet have

carried home to light their cottage dwellings rich armfuls of the plundered gold.

Perhaps the forgotten warriors, whose mail-clad effigies guard now the porch of yonder church, remembered long these sunny fields.

Marlborough's stately duchess may have wandered many a time in fancy back to this quiet Mendip village, where she, too, a careless child, played in these meadows of asphodel.

Round another house some miles away, which tradition also points to as a home of hers, are daffodils again.

Not in broad sheets gilding the level fields, but peering out of hedgerows, skirting the edges of woodlands, leaning over the waters of the brook that, breaking from its dark chamber in the hill, steals away to join the lazy river that winds across the moorland to the sea.

Higher up among the hills, in a rocky valley overgrown with thickets, is a great colony of daffodils that have found a spot more picturesque perhaps, though without the striking effect of the rich masses that spread untrammelled in the open.

The ground is honeycombed with crumbling shafts and ruined galleries, piled with heaps of rubbish and strewn with refuse ore.

These hills are rich in metal. They have had a long history. The ores of Somerset were known even to Tyrian traders. The Roman conquerors laid eager

hands on the 'silver' mines of Mendip; and it is barely half a century since the palmy days of these now ruinous villages, when every man who worked for his own hand could raise a pound's worth of metal in a day.

But the ore was poor. It would not repay the cost of machinery, and when the veins ran too deep to be easily managed by manual labour, they were followed no further.

Thus the hills are scarred from end to end with the abandoned workings. Thus the mining villages have fallen on evil times, and the 'rugged miners' are now little more than a memory.

One curious relic of their craft survives. The divining-rod, constantly employed in bygone days in tracing the course of veins of metal, is even in our time by no means forgotten.

There are still men who can 'dowse' for ore or water. Still before a well is sunk the aid of the 'dowsing-rod' is called in to make sure of a suitable spot.

Over all the valley there grows a very jungle of hazel and briar, with scattered oak trees and clumps of blackthorn.

Among the thickets badgers still find shelter.

On heaps of stone, whose hard edges are blurred with moss and fringed with graceful ferns, vipers bask in the long summer afternoons, and warm their dusky armour in the sun.

Here in this sheltered hollow we may read how well with her deft fingers Nature hides the works of Man, how swiftly his memory is effaced, how soon his presence is forgotten.

This rugged brow, that looks no other than the living rock, so grey is it with clinging lichens, so draped with soft green moss, so hung with ivy, and so tasselled everywhere with ferns, is the entrance of an ancient mine.

In the crevices of the unmortared masonry the wood-sage is beginning to unfurl its wrinkled leaves.

Over the mounds near by, the spotted blades of early orchises give promise of plenty of rich colour later on.

Under a great bramble, whose armed branches shelter well the plants that put their trust in its shadow, springs the rich green foliage of a tall spurge-laurel, that in its growth recalls the graceful figure of the hapless Daphne, and in the sweet breath of its pallid blossoms the fragrance of her youth.

And everywhere among the thickets, lifting their bright faces through the tangle of the briars, drooping gracefully from crevices in the rock itself, are myriads of daffodils. There are clumps of them among all the scattered bushes, there are patches on the hill-crest higher up, they peer out of the hedge of the lane that winds along at the foot of the valley, they have climbed the steep slope of the pasture beyond.

Lying idly here upon the sunny slope you gradually

grow conscious of the presence near you of a score of shy companions who, when you are still, will pursue without fear their various avocations.

Faint rustling sounds among the bushes betray the movements of some mouse or lizard.

There are dormice here—Seven Sleepers the villagers call them—but they are hardly awake so early as this.

Yonder a tiny sun beetle in glittering armour hurries across a patch of sandy soil.

Another beetle, wheeling past like a sleepy blue-bottle fly, settles down within reach of your hand. Look away for a moment and you will find it hard to see him again, so well does his green coat fit in with the tint of the surrounding leaves. It is not easy to catch him, he is quick in his movements and prompt to take wing, and when he is caught he may give you a smart nip with his strong jaws that will make you think 'tiger-beetle' no bad name for him. He is a cannibal too, and should you be so rash as to imprison two together, you will be reminded, when you open the box, of the fate of the Kilkenny cats.

Now you hear among the grass the faint cry of a shrew, perhaps even see the timid little creature that vanishes at your slightest movement.

That prolonged rustle is perhaps a grass snake gliding away among the thickets.

A very real touch of spring-time is the butterfly that is flitting here and there among the bushes, his yellow wings just matching the colour of the daffodils.

This sunny morning has tempted him from his winter sleep to make the most of the last few weeks of his brief existence.

In the topmost branches of a beech, that lifts its slender column high above the underwood, a party of linnets have alighted. They are singing all at once, and as the spray that bends beneath their weight swings gently in the wind, the rhythm of their song seems just in keeping with the dreamy motion.

From the depths of a broad holly bush below there comes the note of a restless blackbird, whose mate is perhaps by this time sitting on her eggs in the friendly shelter of the prickly bush.

Presently something startles him outright, and he dashes headlong from cover with a shriek of terror loud enough to frighten all the birds in the valley.

In old days, so runs the legend, some master of the Black Art surprised in his cavern a white bird unearthing with irreverent bill the treasures concealed beneath the floor. Still the unhappy bird wears the suit of sable to which, by the wand of the enchanter, was changed his garb of snow. Still the blackbird repeats the scream he uttered as he fled headlong from the terrible presence. Still to his beak there clings a trace of the magician's gold.

Close by, the footfall of a bird stirs among the withered leaves, and presently a robin flies up into the dwarf oak-tree overhead, and flits uneasily from

branch to branch, uttering at times a single plaintive note.

Can his nest be near? In a hollow in the rock before you a few dead leaves have lodged, and before them hang like a veil three fronds of harts-tongue. There seems no definite arrangement, no trace of art about them, but when you put the ferns aside you see the rounded outline of a nest, and within it are the four warm eggs.

This, then, is what the robin is anxious about. You will leave his nest unharried, remembering the service of the bright-eyed singer, and, as you make your way down through the thickets, he will pay you with a song.

WHEN ALL THE WORLD IS YOUNG.



IT is the very glory of the spring-time. Though April, coy as ever, was chary of her sunshine and all too lavish of the

useful trouble of the rain, she left the lanes and copses all aglow with flowers.

Broader grow each day the fans of the horse-chestnut, sweeter the fragrance of the black poplar, brighter the glow of blossoming almond-trees.

Deeper are the clouds of green that among the dark pines on the hill are gathering round the larch tops.

Higher still under the hedgerows grows the wilderness of flowers and ferns and leaves.

Louder rises the clamour of the rookery as the querulous cries of the nestlings grow stronger in their wind-rocked cradles.

More glorious yet is the music of the thrush ; and at the hour of twilight welcome still as ever comes the blackbird's song.

Now, too, the redstart and the wryneck, the blackcap and the nightingale, and many another truant who left us when the leaves began to fall, come back across the sea, and take their part in the great chorus.

And if at times the air blows keen on the world without, this sheltered hollow is ever full of the warm south ; here we seem even on the threshold of the summer.

Over the soft earth turned up by mouse and mole and worm, until the foot sinks deep at every step, is spread a very carpet of celandine leaves, strewn with wide yellow blooms like studs of gold. The white stars of wood anemones are scattered like snow on all

the slopes. Wood violets open shyly their pale eyes, as if conscious of their lost perfume.

Leaves that promise a very blaze of colour are springing everywhere among the thickets. The bright foliage of the hawthorn, the bronzed palms of the sycamore, the swaying canopies of woodbine, and the feathery tufts upon the larch, seem to fill the glade with a soft green mist and to tinge the very air with their tender tone.

The wood is all astir with life and music. Chaffinch and oxeye, wren and robin, missel-thrush and blackbird, are singing all day long on every side, and not a note too much, nor ever out of tune.

Among the swaying elm boughs overhead a willow-warbler, just come back, utters at intervals his gentle song. The quiet little cadence rippling down through the branches has in it almost a murmur of regret, as if for summer lands too soon forsaken.

It is a quiet spot. There is indeed a pathway here, but so seldom is it used that a thrush has built undisturbed so near the way that you might touch her with your hand in passing. She is sitting even now. Over the rim of the nest you can see her tail erect, her sharp bright eye that is conscious of your every movement. She will let you almost touch her if you approach her softly, but, just before you can stroke her smooth brown back, she glides away from under your hand, leaving to your mercy the bright blue eggs warm from the pressure of her tender breast.

Disturbed, perhaps, by her passing shadow as she stole silently away, a wren, that was just now singing loud and clear his perfect little melody, startles the woodland with his shrill alarm.

Close by is his dwelling—a handful of dry leaves among the ivy that holds a sturdy oak in close embrace. Reassured by your stillness, however, the restless little builder grows quiet again, and even creeps back through the bushes to resume his work. Presently, with a tuft of down in his beak, he flies up to the nest, and disappears within the tiny entrance.

From the shadows of the elms, that cluster on the opposite slope, comes now and then the pleasant coo of the ringdove; more rarely still the quiet laugh of a solitary woodpecker.

And all the while, among the tree-tops, in the bushes, on the ground itself, sounds the pleasant voice of the busy little chiffchaff.

Suddenly breaks in a louder song, sweeter, clearer, richer still than all. It is the blackcap's mellow strain, and yonder flits among the thickets the restless figure of the singer.

He is silent again, and you can trace him now only by the tremor of a spray that bends beneath his weight, or a rustling among the dry leaves of the bramble.

Then in the shadows unseen he sings again—

> 'Low at times and loud at times,
> And changing like a poet's rhymes.'

Now his voice is faint, and hardly heard above the sounds of the wood. Now it is harsh and altogether unmusical. Again, it is a faultless strain that rivals the pæan of the very nightingale.

Silent again, the wilful little singer! Then he threads his way upward through the bushes, and coming to the light at last, he balances a moment on a spray of briar just touched with vivid green, and pours his heart out in a burst of song.

The slender outline of his sylph-like form, the delicate gray of his breast, the dark feathers of his tufted crown, are clear against the green background of the wood.

How dull and cold must seem to him these wintry thickets after the fair lands he has traversed in his homeward flight!

For his comrades who linger by the way, the orange-groves are sweet on the steep slopes of Sorrento, the sun is warm upon the Pincian Hill.

It was but yesterday that he, too, felt the hot breath of Vesuvius, lingered among its sunny vineyards, or sang in the green lanes that vein the warm heart of Apennine.

He may have loitered, perhaps, in the lovely wilderness that day by day grows wilder still round the neglected villa in the Sabine Hills.

Resistless, indeed, is the charm of its cool arcades and stately cypresses, the ceaseless plash of its waters, the breath of its blossoming trees. Endless is the beauty of its tangled ways, where dripping statues of river-gods lie half hidden in the tall reeds, where

graceful nymphs peer shyly out through the wild orange-trees.

Listen! how in the dark thickets the blackcaps sing! To them, too, it is a garden of delight, a lotos-land too fair to leave. And among the broken music of their dulcet strains the ear of fancy feigns the chorus—

'We will return no more.'

Do they ever sing to each other here in this sober English woodland of that paradise that, stretching far along those sunny slopes, makes the wreck of Hadrian's magnificent villa more glorious now in the splendour of its ruin than when the stout-hearted Emperor died unwept upon the shore at Baiæ?

Its costly marbles are scattered to the winds, but the ivy and the creeper have draped with rarer beauty the ruined arches with their bright festoons; flower and fern have crowned the crumbling walls with waving plumes.

And in place of rare mosaics, once the wonder of the world, the warm sun of April has scattered bright anemones—crimson, white, and blue—broadcast in the rich green grass.

And in the roofless halls, where once in peerless beauty shone the triumphs of the sculptor's art, the coronella, mingling with the dark foliage of the ilex, droops its scented gold. The wind that wanders through the silent corridors is heavy with the breath of flowers.

Across the sunny spaces in the ruins flit bright-

winged butterflies, resting on the sweet lips of an orchis, or on the crimson petals of a cyclamen.

And everywhere, like the genii of the place, innumerable lizards, clouded with exquisite tones of brown and green, sun themselves on every stone, and cling to the rough bark of the ancient olive-trees, and at the sound of footsteps vanish swift as thought into unsuspected crannies in the walls.

At times a dark snake, basking on a heap of fragments overgrown with thyme, and borage, and cyclamen, uncoils its dusky folds and glides rustling away.

At times there floats upon the quiet air the music of the nightingale.

Everywhere among the ilex thickets sounds the blackcap's song. The little singers have reached the limit of their wanderings; they will never pass beyond the gray fringe of olives that skirts the rugged hills.

No note of discord breaks the quiet of their rest. The god of silence, long since borne from his neglected shrine, sits forlorn amid the stir of Rome; but still his reign endures, broken only by hushed footfalls on the turf, by rustle of timid creatures in the grass, by sigh of wind, or song of nightingale.

What wonder if, amid the peace and beauty of this fair retreat, the wanderers should pause from their weary journey, fold their tired wings, and sing in plaintive tone—

> '—Our island home
> Is far beyond the wave; we will no longer roam.'

THE POSTERN GATE.

A BROAD and well-kept highway winds down this quiet glen. Noble woods, whose fresh young leafage brightens in the sweet May weather, clothe the sides of the ravine, and far in among the green depths all day the birds are singing.

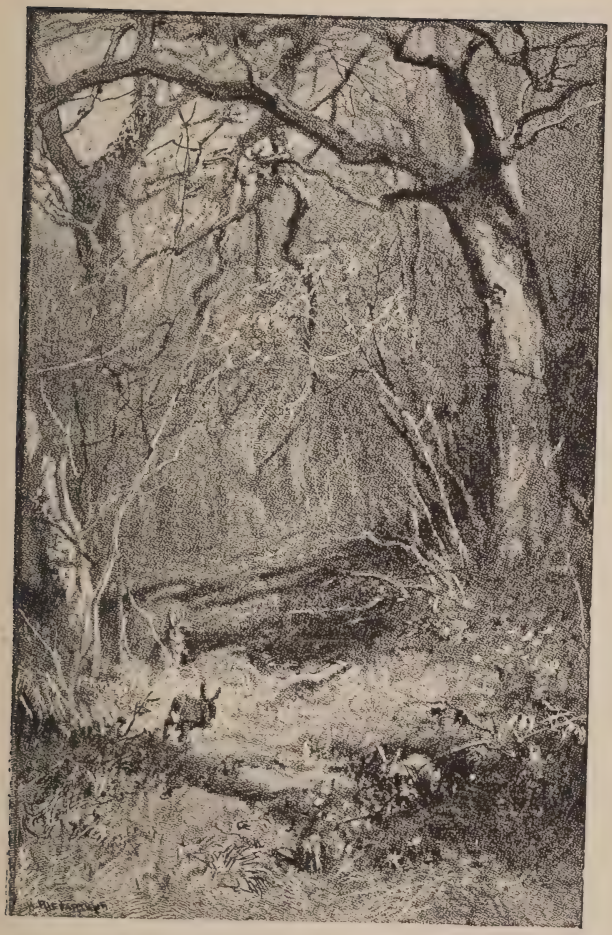
But the trees stand back for the most part behind a fringe of fields. The flowers that light the shadows about the feet of the tall beeches look down from a distance on the wistful eyes of the wayfarer.

Bright butterflies flit across in the sunshine, and toy and circle in the air, and seem like points of light against the living green.

Now and then a jay drifts overhead to her nest among the trees that cling to the steep sides of the valley.

From the larches on the hill the soft voices of ringdoves ripple downward through the dreamy air.

Out of the hedgerows, that, with their lavish flowers, their ivy-clad tree-roots, and their wealth of green, are the very outposts of the wood, shy field-mice creep



out in the gloaming, and frisk along the strip of grass that skirts the highway; perhaps a weasel may run hastily across, and shrews are faintly heard among the tangle of the banks.

But the real life of the woodland is still unseen; save for their voices, the tenants of the sylvan sanctuaries make little sign.

Along the broad paths that have been cleared through the thickets you may draw nearer to the tenants of the wood. Through the bushes peer the bright eyes of rabbits; the ground is scratched and scarred by their industrious feet; the light earth from their burrows is heaped high under the hazels. From a rocky hollow overhung with holly boughs a blackbird dashes out; there is her nest, deftly cradled in a coil of knotted ivy-stems. A wren, too, a mere ball of brown, seems to fall from an ivied tree-stump, and goes singing down the path before you.

Now the pathway wanders along under the hill in the shade of stately beeches, wearing now their very loveliest of May attire. Clustering fir-trees mingle their dark foliage with the graceful plumes of the larch. In a yew bough drooping low, a pair of gold-crests have woven, among the slender twigs, their tiny nest.

Still greener grows the path. The foot falls noiseless on the mossy way. A wood-warbler swinging overhead, conscious of no intrusion, utters now and then his hasty little gushes of song, or calls with

musical tongue to some distant comrade of the green-wood. The ringdove, brooding on her white eggs among the ivy, hears you not till you are close beneath her tree, and then crashes out with a loud clatter of her startled wings.

But still, you are only on the threshold; not yet have you reached the heart of the woodland. Only to him who steals silently along by unfrequented ways the timid children of the wood reveal their secrets. Only for him who enters by the postern gate are the little dramas of their lives laid bare.

There is no broad pathway now, no entrance well defined; the thickets are tangled, and the way is rough.

The trunk of a grey old ash-tree hewn down long since, and left forgotten where it fell, lies half buried in the soft earth. Shell-like fungi, marked with delicate wavy lines of green and brown and yellow, cling by hundreds to the crumbling bark. Strong sprays of bramble arch it over. Springing leaves of meadow-sweet promise a canopy of fragrant foam. Midsummer will hide it altogether with grass and fern, and broad leaves of the burdock.

And like some huge rock that winter storm has hurled into a mountain stream, the old tree has made more devious still the uncertain path that wanders idly through the bushes.

On either side rises a tall elm whose boughs lean down to sweep the very ground.

It is the postern gate. Few footsteps enter here. Even the keeper seldom puts aside the guelder rose and the maple that join hands to bar the way. The light feet of the sleek brown spaniel, that follows him like a shadow, rarely rustle in these deep dead leaves. The very rabbits, astonished here to meet a stranger, stand at gaze a moment before they turn to fly.

The ground is green with broad leaves of garlic, patches of wood-sanicle, and belts of the enchanter's nightshade. Orchis and bluebell, primrose and anemone, woodspurge and pale herb paris are strewn broadcast among the bushes — a very paradise of flowers. The woodruff already begins to scent the air, and the sorrel hangs its dainty bells by hundreds among the moss of ancient trees.

Standing here among the sheltering thickets you begin to realize how full the woodland is of life; how many birds they are that sing to us of summer. High above them all sounds the cuckoo's cry, full and clear and mellow, and with no suspicion in it yet of the hoarseness that in a few short weeks will overtake him.

Small wonder is it that his voice should fail! Early and late he is calling, often for hours together, with hardly a pause for rest, in answer, so the legends say, now to love-sick youth, and now to weary age, each asking him with anxious heart the same question— 'How long must I wait?'

He is sitting now on the very summit of a lofty

ash, whose branches, tipped with black like points of charcoal, show yet no sign of budding green. Now he takes wing, still calling as he flies, pausing now and then to say softly, and under his breath, in rapid notes, '*kawk, kok, kak, kik,*' and then again resumes his clear familiar cry.

Suddenly, above the sweet harmonies of the wood, sounds the voice of a starling, copying in swift succession the notes of jackdaw and yellow-hammer, swallow and missel-thrush.

What is he doing here, in the heart of the wood? He is perched in one of a group of beeches that lift their stately heads high above the thickets.

You are just beneath the tree, hushing as best you may the sound of your movements on the rustling leaves, when a dead stick snaps under your tread.

The starling overhead takes wing with startled cry. Another, flying out from lower down, betrays the secret. They are land-grabbers ; they have driven out the rightful tenants, and taken possession of their holding.

The old trunk is scarred and pitted by the beaks of woodpeckers, and some twenty feet from the ground is the hole that was once their nest. The round entrance bears marks of age. The bark has long since hidden the signs of the miner's tool. The polished sides betray the passing of generations of starlings.

The woodpeckers have found another home ; they

are near us still, and at times you may hear above the rich music of the thrush, and in the pauses of the robin's song, their bursts of laughter ringing clear and loud.

Over the hedge that skirts the lower border of the wood are visible the straggling apple-trees of a neglected orchard. Among the grey boughs a redstart utters now and then his unstudied little song. You may even catch the sudden flicker of red as the bright little bird leaps lightly down to the grass beneath him.

In another tree, standing rather apart from the rest, a nuthatch wanders up and down, calling to some companion—his mate, perhaps--who answers from one of the sturdy oaks across the valley.

Let us cross the strip of ploughed land to the orchard, where the bright grass is brighter still with cuckoo-flower and cowslip, and look at the tree.

A nuthatch flies out, and taking refuge in the pollard-ash hard by, watches anxiously our movements.

Here is the hole. The birds have found the opening too large to suit them, and have been plastering it up with mud. The little masons have laid on a coating more than an inch thick already, and the well-tempered surface is dinted all over with the marks of their sharp bills.

The nest itself is hardly begun yet—merely a handful of dry leaves about a foot below the entrance.

How the birds are singing in the wood! A score

of species, at least, there are taking more or less part in the service.

Not always is the harmony unbroken. In the interlacing boughs of the two elms, beneath whose shade we entered, a pair of missel-thrushes have built their nest. And now, when a magpie, sweeping down from the wood above, sails idly past to forage in the fields, the two thrushes dash headlong from their cover to chase the foe from their threshold.

And all at once, with the shrieking of the angry thrushes, the chatter of the astonished magpie—taken for once all unaware—and the alarms of startled blackbirds, the wood is in an uproar.

The fugitive dives into a thicket; close behind him follow his pursuers. He seeks refuge in the air, but they follow him still, scolding him with shrill tongues, and buffeting him with their wings. Not satisfied with driving the enemy from the gate, they chase him far down the valley, until the sounds of conflict die away in the distance, and quiet settles down once more upon the peaceful wood.

And, as if by way of contrast to these notes of discord, there rises high above all other sounds the song of an unseen nightingale. A moment only does he sing. There are but a few bars of his rare and exquisite melody, and he is heard no more.

It is not the hour for him yet. But when the light of sunset is drawn across the entrance of the valley, when fiery clouds are red through the pine-trees on

the hill, when the singers of the daylight grow silent one by one, there will rise above the rush of the far-off stream

> 'The self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears among the alien corn.'

AT THE BEND OF THE RIVER.

IT is the time when leaves are greenest. Summer has begun her reign; Spring is vanishing among the trees.

It is the May-time of the poets. Surely never were there whiter sheets of daisies in the pasture, never blazed so bright the gorse upon the hill, never shone the meadows with such wealth of gold. Never were woods more full of beauty, skies more blue, or fields more fair.

We will hold no longer by the saws that warned us of the treachery of May, of her fleeting sunshine, of her fickle moods. She is a queen, a goddess born. Prophecies of evil fall on heedless ears as we feel our hearts beat high in answer to her soft caresses, while her breath is sweet upon our heated brows; when we think, as we listen in the twilight, that the year has lent new beauty to the blackbird's hymn, that there is more charm than ever in the music of the lark.

It is a day of golden weather.

A haze as of the summer broods over the landscape,

and deepens the soft blue shadows among the elms that tower into the dreamy air.

Here behind this fringe of alders no breath can reach you from without; ever the warm sun beats down upon this sea of boulders—the playthings of the wild river in far-off days, the days when all was young.

As you bask in the sunshine, you may watch at will the birds that haunt this quiet nook; watch the dainty wagtails wander up and down upon the yellow sand, hear the musical cry of the sandpiper borne on swift wings down the shore, see the dipper flying to his nest in the cool and moss-grown hollow in the rocks across the stream, where tasselled sedges clinging to the bank below lean down to kiss the water, and, lightly touched in answer by the careless ripples, keep time for ever to their rhythmic song.

Higher up, at the bend of the river, where it widens out over the rapids, the sunlight plays on every whirl and eddy of the swift-running water until a belt of silver, almost too bright to look on, quivers among the dark, moss-tinted stones.

From the sparkling shallows tiny trout are leaping in the sun, and over the water is poised a cloud of gnats in shadowy column, ever rising, falling, circling up and down, the hum of their myriad wings unheard in the murmur of the stream.

Below the dipper's nest the channel narrows between the rocks, and the river rushes in green waves

headlong through, to widen further down in a deep, dark pool that the storms of ages have hollowed in its granite bed.

Tall young royal ferns fringe with pale fronds the wandering shore. The steep bank is crowned with tangled underwood and knotted willow-roots, in whose shade the otters come by night and plunge down into the pool below, where now the slow-moving water lingers by the shore to double in its magic glass the beauty of the broom.

High over all rises a belt of noble woodland, among whose clustering trees you may catch brief glimpses of warblers stirring in the bushes, of ring-doves that forage in the rustling leaves.

Now a whitethroat, after warbling half his breathless little madrigal in the heart of a thicket, rises high in air, as if upborne by the resistless impulse of his happy soul, singing all the while; and then, the music ended, he dives headlong downwards into the green depths to sit again beside his mate. You watch his flight, but the song itself can hardly reach you here across the river. The air is full already of soft and soul-like sound.

Over all other voices swells the ceaseless murmur of the river. At times is faintly heard the mingled music of the birds far up the slope in the shadow of the trees, the stir of leaves that flutter overhead, the soft sighing of the wind that ever lightly stirs along the stream. Yes,

'There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass.
Music that gentler on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes.'

Above the gentler sounds breaks in at times the shrill call of a pheasant. His mate and he wander in the covers idle and disconsolate. Other tenants of the wood are toiling for their children's bread; their work is taken from them.

Even now, among the coops scattered along the sunny slope of the paddock on the hill, the keeper has his hands full with the foster-mothers and their tender charge.

When the young broods are strong and are driven to the woods, they will meet their rightful parents as strangers altogether.

A brief life at best is theirs. A single summer among the green wilderness of this quiet valley, and then, some cool October morning, swift fate will overtake them, and struck down, perhaps by the very hand that now with jealous care protects them, they will fall, dying on the dying leaves.

Suddenly there comes a shadow on the water, and a slow, stately beat of wings.

A heron drifts by along the river, nor dreams that strange eyes see him pass. His long legs trail behind him; his sharp beak is sunk upon his breast. He is so near that you may see every tone of grey and white and black among his plumage, the long feathers

that droop upon his breast, the dark plume upon his head, the yellow stains upon his cruel bill.

No thought of danger ruffles his calm, cold heart, or quickens by a single beat the movements of his mighty wings. With slow, deliberate flight he sweeps along, almost touching the water as he flies.

He has reached the bend of the river. He is gone, uttering, just before he vanished behind the green wall of alders, a muttered croak, as if satisfied, on nearing his favourite strip of sand, to find no brother angler on the ground before him.

A couple of lapwings, disturbed perhaps by his approach, rise above the trees, and after circling idly once or twice across the river, fly off towards their haunt among the hills.

Their work is over for the season. The young lapwings, who can run as soon as they are out of the shell, and quickly learn to find a living for themselves, return no more at night to the shelter of their mother's wings.

Here among the hills of Devon you may see little of these active dwellers on the heath. But in the heart of Mendip, perhaps, where the spaces are less vast, you may chance on a little company not yet scattered to the winds.

It is a lonely spot. The great gorge has died away on the edge of the moor. The King of Mendip, with his crown of barrows, lifts broad shoulders far along the sky-line. The slopes are brown and bare, save

where forests of young bracken light the long sweeps of sad-coloured hills.

In the distance are the roofless buildings of a deserted mine. Everywhere in this great hollow the ground is rough and broken in the search for ore—turned and re-turned by the miners of two thousand years.

Now over all is a silence as of the grave. No sign of life is there, except a party of lapwings that wheel and tumble in the air after the manner of their kind, and cry now and then in plaintive tone.

Some on the ground take wing as you draw near; but two remain, until you can see their long curved crests and the green and chestnut markings of their glossy plumage. Then they too rise, and sail reluctantly away.

As you stand a moment to watch their flight across the sky you suddenly become aware of a tiny moving figure hurrying up the slope after the old birds. A young peewit, no doubt. It stops. You note the place with care, and walk straight up to the spot; when, lo! there is no bird to be seen. Some clods of earth, indeed, but the young peewit has vanished altogether.

But as you look closer at the clods of earth something in their shape attracts your notice, and you see, not one alone, but two young lapwings crouching flat n the short grass at your very feet.

Take one up in your hand. An odd little object he

is, with preposterously long legs, a coat of down marked and mottled like the dry earth of the hill, and absurd little winglets like the flappers of a seal. When you set him down upon the grass again he toddles off a little way on his long, ungainly legs, pauses a moment to cry for help with the voice of an anxious kitten, and then makes off up the hill as fast as he may.

His comrade rises, too, and follows, and the two quaint little figures climb safely up the slope and disappear.

The old birds, too, have vanished, and even these gleams of life have faded from the dreary moorland.

For ages, perhaps, the lapwings have returned each spring-time to this broad hollow in the hills. Year by year their haunt among the rushes remains undisturbed.

Not always did such stillness brood over this voiceless waste. The brake grows high where once the legions trod. These mounds and hollows are the ghosts of a forgotten town. Its very name has perished.

But, in all the fields about, the plough turns up bright shards of pottery, that bear in bold relief figures of fighting legionaries, or stories of the chase.

Even in our own time the labourer's spade still brings to light hoarded handfuls of denarii; clashes still on sling-bolt and spear-head, on broken amphora and rusted sword.

Corroded sheets of lead record that the levies of

Antonine tamed, for a space at least, the wild tribes of the hills. No further clue to their history remains. No other hint of their victory or defeat. No word to tell whether their dark Armenian captain passed in safety through the perils of the war, or whether, on some hill-top near, his ashes lie—

> 'Heaped over with a mound of grass,
> Two handfuls of white dust shut in an urn of brass.'

THEIR FIRST APPEARANCE.

THERE is no time in all the year in which some young birds do not begin to earn their first experience.

Sparrows and starlings sometimes leave the nest in the very depth of winter. Robins have been hatched at Christmas. Waterton found in December even a young owlet wearing still its dress of down.

But it is now, when woods are greenest, now in the warm June weather, that the tide of life is rising to the full. Now it is that we hear on every side, from hedge and tree and housetop, the childish voices of the young poets of the air.

Not a tithe of all the gathering multitudes can ever see a second season. For the weasel and the sparrow-hawk, the caitiff crow and all his brother bandits, will hold high revel in the covers.

Were it not for the balance which is thus maintained, we should be overrun altogether by crowds of hungry birds.

Nature manages her own affairs much better than

we can, with our tinkering interference. If hawks were spared and magpies left in peace, we should hear very little about plagues of small birds.

Even the owl, impelled by the needs of her nestlings to start on the chase somewhat earlier in the day than usual, may pick up a casual youngster here and there that happens to come in her way.

It is very little, however, that owls do in this direction. The very hours they keep ensure their paying attention more to fur than feather, and careful examination of the rejected remains of food that accumulate in their haunts has proved again and again that birds form a very small part indeed of their customary diet.

The eagle owl, indeed, has been known to bring home partridges and blackcock, and even dead lambs.

But the eagle owl is a stranger here ; when he does pay us a visit, he meets with a reception that precludes all hope of his return.

The owlets who were hatched in the early days of May are hardly ready yet to join the twilight forays of their elders. An odd-looking crew they are, huddled together in their hollow tree. Even the old bird is a ludicrous object.

But, after all, the eyes of day have no business with the bird of night. It is only in the twilight that he wakens into life. Sallying out at dusk from his snug retreat in tower or tree, he floats like a phantom over the fields on his soft and soundless wings ; or, perched

in one of the tall elms on the edge of the meadow, startles the stillness with his mellow call.

To the owlet spreading for the first time his downy wings to leave the shelter of his home, the outer world is altogether strange and new.

Ever, indeed, will he look upon the landscape with other eyes than ours. For him the shadow goes backward on the dial. The fire of sunset is to him the light of dawn; his day, the silent hours of night lit with cold stars or keen full moon.

Some birds there are who early in their young experience learn something of the stir of life. Young kingfishers, hatched in the darkness of their tunnel, come to the entrance and look out long before their wings are grown. They grow familiar with the hum of the mill and the dreamy plash of the old wheel, they watch the play of ripples round the stones, they see the cloud of minnows dart like arrows up the stream.

But to the young jackdaws in the tower the world at present means no more than a grim Norman wall, a brief stretch of narrow, time-worn stair, a single gleam of daylight overhead.

The whole ascent is strewn with piles of sticks and heather. Above the belfry, the way is blocked entirely by the great nests that the old birds have heaped even four feet high upon the ancient steps.

And now the time approaches when the dark-coated nestlings begin to scramble off their nests, and

flutter up the winding stair towards that narrow chink above them. They have heard but little yet of the stir of life, beyond the hum of the village or the clangour of the bells.

Now they look down upon a great world far below them, a world of blossoming orchards and rich meadow lands. It is their first sight of tree or sun or sky.

Four grey heads look anxiously down from the narrow threshold. Their elders all the while are wheeling round the tower, floating now and then near by as if to tempt the timid aeronauts to make that first perilous plunge.

One of them gathers heart and flutters out. He gains the footing of one of the gargoyles that the barbarous 'restorers' have spared to the grey old pile, while all the neighbours shout a chorus of encouragement. Another spreads his wings and alights on a battered scrap of carving on the wall.

Now all four have passed the brink, and one by one they gain the battlement of the tower, fluttering from point to point, until at last they muster courage to trust themselves upon the yielding air, and follow their parents to the fields below.

It is a strange collection of materials that the jackdaw loves to accumulate in its untidy nest. Sticks and paper, carpet and cowhair, bits of cloth and scraps of string, are all made use of.

Most birds that are hangers-on of men, and find a

living in the farm-yard or the street, are ready to avail themselves of the handiwork of their suzerain in the construction of their nests.

A stray end of string or worsted used in this way as building material has, ere now, brought dire disaster on the unfortunate architects. One old bird even contrived to hang itself in a loop of worsted. Young sparrows, snared by the lining of the nest, have been imprisoned until late in the winter, fed all the while by faithful relatives, until some kindly hand released them from their bondage.

Although many broods are fledged already, and many more will soon have taken wing, there are not a few birds that still possess their souls in patience, warming their unhatched eggs.

The kestrel, in her crevice in the cliff, has heard no faint note of life beneath her sheltering feathers.

Still the goldcrest is swinging in her snug green hammock among the dark leafage of the churchyard yew. A tiny nest it is to hold so much. A family of eight have to find room in it, under their mother's wings. But they are a tiny race; five of them full-grown would not amount altogether to a single ounce.

Less fettered still are the swifts, whose labours have hardly even yet begun. Still on their untiring wings they career with joyous screams across the sky.

Astir before the day begins to glimmer in the east,

on the wing through the hot summer noon, still flying when the glow of sunset has faded from the sea, all day long they wander in the air.

The nest of the swift shows but little art in its construction, nor is it always, indeed, the work of the bird itself. It will, occasionally at least, appropriate a house-sparrow's nest, whether occupied or not; and more than once has a brood of young sparrows been seen which had apparently been turned out by the swifts and left to perish on the ground.

The sparrow, for his part, is much addicted to seizing on the nest of a swallow—more frequently still on that of a house-martin, even when just new from the hands of the builders.

It has often been said that the aggrieved owners have been known to call in the assistance of sympathizing neighbours, and that the assembled troop have then walled up the unfortunate sparrows—to die of starvation in their ill-gotten hold. Happily, however, for the reputation of the martin, it is very doubtful if there is any real authority for the story.

Swifts seem unusually abundant this year (1889), but swallows and martins have come back to us in sadly diminished numbers.

The reason for this difference is not far to seek. The dark plumage of the swift has no charm in the eyes of the high-born beauties, for whose adornment so many thousand lives have been sacrificed this spring.

The destruction of swallows has, indeed, been most lamentable. The report recently presented to the Zoological Society of France, after describing how the birds are taken, and for what purpose they are killed, urges that the French Government should interfere to protect a race whose services to man are beyond all calculation. So great has been already the havoc made that there are parts of France where the swallow, once numerous, is now unknown. 'If this destruction goes on for a few years longer,' continues the report, 'France will in ten years have no more swallows except in her collections.'

Unhappily for us, the homeward path of our migrants lies through France, and thus it happens that our own particular birds are killed in thousands on the Mediterranean coast as they alight spent and breathless on the land.

The most destructive means employed is the treacherous wire, on which the tired travellers too trustfully alight, and are slain wholesale by an electric discharge.

This is a swift, and perhaps a painless death, but the report alludes also to snares and even hooks. One shudders to think of the little creatures fluttering in agony upon a baited hook—for what? To furnish an adornment for some Parisian belle 'all gentleness, mercy, and pity.'

This is the reason why this year so many of us miss the pleasant twitter of the martins round our eaves;

why the nests where we have so often seen them cling are crumbled and deserted. This is why the swallows come no more to their nests among the rafters.

How dark to us would be the dawn of spring if on the empty sky we should watch for them in vain! How cold the summer days in which we heard no more their snatches of sweet song, nor caught the glitter of their sunny wings! They would be to us as to the poet the vanished faces of his friends—

> 'Something is gone from Nature since they died,
> And summer is not summer, nor can be.'

THE GIFT OF SONG.



THE time of song is overpast. The long summer days, with all their glory of leaves and flowers and fragrance, have lost the crowning touch of melody, and there is more of clamour than of music in the sounds that stir the stillness of the wood.

The anthem of the thrush, indeed, to which with eager ears we listened even in the dark days of January, is sounding for us still. The whistle of the blackbird, that gathered strength in the bright days of April, and reached its prime in the splendour of a perfect May, in woodland walks and garden alleys, echoes still. Still the chaffinch sings, and the wren. Still the blackcap makes sweet music in the green aisles of the wood.

But we hear no more the white-throat and the willow-wren, the redstart, and all the inconstant troubadours who came to us from the warm south.

The nightingale is silent altogether. The general verdict ranks him first of all the tuneful train. And when his heart is in his singing there is none to match him of all sweet minstrels of the wood or field.

But he is a wilful singer. Many a night he holds his peace altogether, or sings a few brief bars, and then is silent. And there is always for him the charm of the hour, the glamour of 'serene and quiet nights when all the heavens are fair.'

We pass, by the well-remembered gate, into the shadows of the wood. The path that winds through the thickets is hardly seen under its canopy of hazel and of briar. The trees are still. There is no sound but the low murmur of some distant owl, or the faint rustlings of night-wandering creatures on the withered leaves.

Suddenly, out of the darkness close at hand, there

rise a few loud notes that seem to cut the air with keen clear tone.

That is the prelude. And then follow the liquid warble, the plaintive monotone, the silvery trill—all the beauty of that wonderful song that poets in all ages have delighted to honour.

And although Audubon claimed the mocking-bird as the chief of singers ; though to the fancy of Linnæus sweeter seemed the warble of the redwing ; though to the colonist of New Zealand the organ-bird surpasses all the half-forgotten songsters of his native land, the nightingale, at his best, need fear no rival.

In so long a composition it is not surprising that there should be constant variations, and indeed it is probable that few birds repeat their songs without alteration. Even the chiffchaff constantly varies the arrangement of his simple notes, and the chaffinch is for ever changing the position of the trills in his polished little ditty, and the number of notes in the flourish at the end.

A bird like the sedge-warbler—who weaves together any songs to which he listens, and who copies all with equal skill—brings endless changes into his song, though it lacks the vigour and expression of more original composers.

He, too, sings in the twilight, though, like the nightingale, you may hear him all the livelong day.

His haunt is by the stream that loiters through the meadows, or among the reeds along the ditch over-

grown with bitter-sweet and iris, where, in the shelter of some low willow bush, his mate and he may weave the fragile nest. The water-rat ploughs a labyrinth of paths through the mantling weed; the rail wanders silently in the hollows under the bank; even the heron folds at nightfall here his broad grey wings.

Here, there sounds among the reeds the twitter of a swallow; then a sparrow chatters in the grass; among the willow-roots rises a bar or two from even the carol of the lark. That is the sedge-warbler's song; a quiet strain, subdued and soft like the plain tones of his plumage.

Most musical birds, indeed, are plainly dressed, and brilliant feathers are rarely associated with the gift of song.

The parrots, brave in gold and scarlet, green and azure, cannot raise a song among them, unless we dignify by such a name the warbling of the parakeets.

Perhaps none of all the feathered tribes are more exquisitely tinted than the humming-birds, and yet among some four hundred species there is only one who sings at all.

Of the Birds of Paradise we know very little. There are species of which only a single specimen has ever been seen by Europeans. Not even the natives of the wild islands of their strange shallow sea know anything of the nest or eggs of any one of the species. But crows they are for all their beauty, and those who

have listened to their voices say that their speech betrays them.

According to the method of the Swedish naturalist Sundevall about one-fourth of all known birds are placed together, in a class called *Oscines*, at the head of the list.

In this division are reckoned the warblers, thrushes, larks, linnets, and finches—in fact, all the birds that sing, as well as a good many, such as the crow and his clan, which are not musical at all.

Birds outside this pale have no gift of song whatever. We listen with delight to the cooing of the dove, to the cry of the cuckoo, to the whistle of the plover, but none of these rises to the dignity of a song.

It is considered by some ornithologists that if birds were classified according to their brain-power, their 'wit and wisdom,' and the completeness of their organization, the raven would take the first place. And although his natural note is harsh in the extreme, he is found to possess the muscles of song in a high state of development.

Once, indeed, according to the legend, he was a bird of rare plumage and melodious song. But his gifts were taken from him by the gods in punishment for vanity and disobedience.

The song-muscles, however, remain; and this is no doubt the reason why the raven learns to copy with such startling clearness the language of his captors.

Too often, indeed, his speech is of the pit, and savours of the nether world—not altogether out of harmony with his plumes of sable.

Birds of Paradise, no doubt, have equal powers of utterance ; were they caught and trained, their language would surely be more in keeping with their bright attire.

The chatter of the jackdaw as, when work is over, he wings his way homeward to his rest among the ruins, has something almost of music in its sound.

Through the hours of daylight, toiling for his brood, the daw has time for little interchange of speech beyond brief monosyllabic greetings as his neighbours pass. But you will hear him better when the shadows gather in the valley, when the light of sunset lingers on the tracery of the great abbey window, and streams in glory down the roofless nave.

From the quiet lane that winds upward from the river you look back to watch the cloud of daws drifting homeward from the hill.

Faintly sound their voices in the distance, growing clearer now, as, nearer still and nearer, float their dark figures on the saffron sky. Now they pause above the ruin, with a mingled chorus from a hundred throats. Now they wheel above the ancient gables, now they flutter down and vanish in unnumbered niches ; or, alighting in dark clusters on some favourite point, they gossip with their neighbours before turning in.

The light fades slowly from the ivied walls. The

swifts no longer scream down the dismantled aisles. The daws are silent; all the sounds of day are hushed.

Somewhere in the valley hoots a restless owl, lingering in the shadows till the gloom shall deepen in the abbey.

Overhead a ringdove flutters out from the shelter of a yew-tree that leans over the lane.

Its dark boughs overshadow a little space of graves: a lonely spot, nestling close under the shelter of the hill. The grass grows high round ancient stones whose rude inscriptions and still ruder rhymes hand down the names, the hopes, the fears of men who may have watched for news of the Armada or taken sides with King or Commons.

There is a half-suggested war-note in the quaintly ordered lines on one recumbent slab:

INTERED · HE · LYETH · VNDER
GROVND · VNTEL · THAT · DAY
THE · TRVMPET · SOVND.

Surely it is Puritan dust over which a fragment lies bearing, in the lettering of the Stuart time, these words alone:

I · TREAD · SATAN · VNDER · MY · FEET.

Hard by, upon another broken stone, is traced this brief pathetic phrase—

AND · ONE · SWEET · SISTER · ALSO.

Were they two children of the village, who, still fair and young, crossed the dark river hand in hand? Was he a Cavalier, who burnt his heart out in a hopeless cause? Did the news of Naseby pale her cheek, or silver ere its time her auburn hair?

Did he pass unscathed the perils of the field to fall with Keymiss in the storming, when he and his handful of heroes held in vain the fortress down the river, whose roofless ruin, now a very bower of green, looks down into the wandering Wye?

And had he long to wait upon 'the other side'? Did she climb alone this steep path between the hedgerows, day by day with slower pace, until she came no more to grieve over that dear, dead dust beneath the turf?

Perhaps there was the same soft scent of roses in the air, the same sweet woodbine incense floating in the lane, when at last they bore her gently up this narrow way, and laid her sadly at his side—one grave, one stone, and now, one epitaph.

His memory is lost; his deeds, his very name forgotten. No note remains, except the link with her in the eloquent silence of that single line—

AND · ONE · SWEET · SISTER · ALSO.

FLOWER-DE-LUCE.

'Beautiful lily, dwelling by still rivers,
Or solitary mere,
Or where the sluggish meadow-brook delivers
Its waters to the weir.'

IT is the hour of noon.

On the soft azure overhead there floats no fleck of cloud. The sun shines hot upon the meadows; over all the valley lies the scent of hay.

But it is the hour of rest.

Sunbrowned mowers, with faces buried in the short, cool grass, lie quiet in the shadow of the trees. No sound of labour rises from the fields, no stave of song, no clink of whetted scythe.

The white houses of the hillside village seem to slumber in the heat, and the shadows deepen round their immemorial elms. Against the haze that hangs along the hill, the old tower rises, hardly seen.

The very birds are silent, save that now and then some restless white-throat sings a few brief notes, or low-voiced willow-wren croons in the alder shade a sleepy tune.

Only the insects are astir: bees that are busy in the clover blooms, butterflies that lightly float from flower to flower, burnet moths in black and crimson that flutter lazily along, and flies innumerable, that follow everywhere with hateful hum.

Welcome to-day is the murmur of the stream; cool the plash of water down the dripping weir; pleasant the pathway that through bright, scented meadows follows the windings of the river.

No rigid lines define these level fields. Their outlines, traced by wandering rivulets, follow lightly every careless curve, now broad, now narrow, and with many a shady nook and sunny corner, loved of birds and bright with flowers. Along the margin of the meadow, dark belts of alder stand, their sober green relieved with fringe of willow herb and marestail, and brightened with broad leaves of iris, that mark with lamps of gold the hidden streams.

Troops of cattle, weary of the blaze of noon, stand knee-deep in the river, and just lift their heads a moment as you pass, to peer with lazy eyes through the cool covert of the trees.

Little colour is there now among this summer green. The glory of the hawthorn is long since scattered on the grass; fallen are the white flowers of the wayfaring tree, nor touched as yet its berries by the wizard sun, who, with his lamp of magic, turns their summer greenness into autumn flame.

But the bryony twines shining wreaths among the

brambles; the elder spreads broad discs to tempt the winged crowds.

And fairest of all flowers of summer the sweet June roses bloom on all their swaying sprays. Some, with generous beauty opened to the full, a soft flush on their wide, scented petals. Others, still folded close, just part their rosy lips to breathe a tender perfume on the air.

And though the midsummer meadows have lost something of the bold colouring of spring; though there are no sheets of daisies now, no broad unbroken acres of buttercup gold, there is a fuller beauty on the fields of June. Tall ox-eye daisies, white and pure, are strewn like stars among the waving grass. Red plumes of sorrel, patches of yellow-rattle, and sweet beds of clover, set all the fields aglow.

The ditches that drain these level sweeps of marsh-land are outlined by young rushes, bright and warm, over whose forest of green lance-points the ragged robin waves its crimson flags. And brighter still than all, the orchis blooms. Some there are, all pale and colourless, and poised like plumes of white on shafts of green; others tinged with soft shades of lavender; others again whose spikes of rich imperial purple shine like fire along the ground. White tufts of cotton-grass are sprinkled here and there, and down among the sedges, half hidden by the tall, green blades, blue flowers of milkwort droop their timid heads.

Standing out from the belt of alders is a stalwart ash-tree, wide of girth and broad of base, with roof of feathery green that invites you to its shadow. Strong stems of ivy cling about the grey old trunk; round its roots there gather in the soft, black earth reeds and rushes and meadow-sweet, and all the plants that love the moisture and the shade.

Who sees it from the pathway only has not learned the secret of the ancient tree. But the loiterer, who follows the windings of the hedgerow, finds on the farther side a spacious chamber, a great hollow hewn by sun and rain.

In a niche within its crumbling walls the flycatcher makes her nest, the creeper hides her home behind the tangle of the ivy, field-mice frolic in the lofty hall.

Other feet, perhaps, have left their traces on that earthen floor. Faltering steps have crossed the meadow to the well-remembered tree — a trysting-place, that may have witnessed, in its time, scenes of some village idyll; that may have watched, in the scented air of twilight, for a white figure coming slowly across the grass, scattering torn daisy petals as she passed, and whispering softly to herself, 'He loves me, loves me not.'

Suddenly, out of the grass at your very feet, starts up with plaintive cry a tiny bird—a tree-pipit—that not long has left the nest, and makes what way he can with wings and feet along the path in front. He

is easily caught; and then, as if resigned to meet his fate, looks boldly at you with his bright black eyes. His little wings are not half grown, and still there clings about his sleek brown head the nestling down of youth.

In an apple-tree near by the parent birds are crying. One of them, no doubt the mother, flits from bough to bough with piteous appeal.

You set the little captive down, and straight it vanishes into the forest of the grass. The anxious mother, flying down to meet it, is content; her cry is heard no more.

Just in front a whinchat hovers, poised above a bright thistle-head, the bars of black and white on his expanded tail clear-cut against the green. He has settled now, and clinging to the crimson flower that sways beneath his weight, he utters now and then a sharp 'Click, click,' of caution and alarm as he watches your approach. You will not disturb him; you turn aside to meet the river.

In the low bushes by the shore a sedgewarbler is singing. White-breasted martins, too, floating on the sunny air, stoop down to touch the stream, meeting their own fair figures in its tranquil face.

A little troop of starlings hurries overhead—two broods at least—neighbours perhaps, hatched beneath the thatch-eaves of village barn, and beginning already to join forces for the winter.

Now a blackbird, flying low across the field, drops

down into the tangle by a distant hedgerow—visiting his nest perhaps, or stooping to dip in the cool stream his yellow bill.

Among the trees across the brook there lies a little space of marshland circled by swift streams: a tangle of alder and willow, a wilderness of buckthorn and hazel; a place of treacherous ground, in which the unwary foot may suddenly sink deep in unsuspected mire. Among its thickets birds find safe sanctuary, and it is the very Camp of Refuge for all the children of the river.

Across two great willow trees, that, uprooted by some wintry storm, lie locked in close embrace, you may pass the little stream.

In the shadow of the mingled boughs that arch it over like a cloister roof, the brooklet wanders clear. Trout are poising in mid-stream, water-rats sit silent by the shore.

As you pause a moment in the shade of the grey willow leaves, even a kingfisher settles near, and watches with keen eyes the silver flow. So near is he that you can see his tiny feet that grasp the rugged bark, can see the glitter on his burnished feathers. So stands he for a moment, silent, motionless, beautiful. Then with sudden start spreads wide his wings, and sails across the meadow like a gleam of light.

It is a very jungle that lines the farther shore. Knee-deep are the tasselled sedges, breast-high the

meadowsweet and marestail, the broad blades of the iris and the graceful leafage of the rue.

A passage through the thickets, hardly seen, a green lane among leaves of bog-bean and tall, tufted grass leads to a little open space in the very heart of the swamp.

Here in the summer evenings drones the night-jar. Here pheasants crow in the twilight, and woodcock find safe cover in the autumn. Here, too, by the imprint of her slender feet, you may track the moor-hen to her haunt.

The ground is carpeted with flowers. Spikes of purple orchis, dwarf tufts of broom, and tall red thistles brighten all the grass. The air is heavy with the breath of fragrant marsh plants, crushed beneath your tread.

At every step, too, moths, and butterflies, and delicate insects, with blue lace-like wings, rise from the green tangle underfoot.

As you put aside with careful touch the stems of sedge that cut like knife-blades the incautious hand, you see below pale lavender pimpernels and bright flowers of the moneywort that scatters on the ground its lavish gold. Vetches, too, clamber up out of the green wilderness, and lay hold of friendly stems that help them to the light.

And filling all the open spaces in the thickets, now brightening the dim shadows of the bushes, now

flaming like a glory in the sun, droop the fair petals of the flower-de-luce, here, as ever, haunting still

> '————the sylvan streams,
> Playing on pipes of reed the artless ditties
> That come to us as dreams.'

No whisper of unrest can mar the quiet of this far retreat. From distant meadows rise the softened sounds of toil, fainter still the gentle murmur of the streams. No louder voice is here than song of goldfinch, sweet and low, the rustle of the restless sedge, the sigh of summer breezes in the reeds.

A ROBBER STRONGHOLD.

THE blue hills of Devon are fading far astern. The heights of Exmoor, the rugged coast-line, the little ports whose streets like stairways rise steeply from the sea, are vanishing in the mist of dawn. From the lighthouse tower of Hartland shines a feeble gleam, that 'shows the matin to be near, and 'gins to pale his ineffectual fire.'

On the smooth water whole fleets of sea-birds ride, idly rocked on the long ocean swell, their white breasts mirrored in the clear green waves.

Some, at the beat of paddles, start as if from dreams, turn to gaze a moment, and then vanish, diving swift as thought beneath the sea.

Others, as the boat draws near, reluctantly take wing, some struggling far along the surface before rising clear.

Right before us, faint and shadowy as some phantom land, dim through the mists of morning, rise the bold, bare cliffs of Lundy.

Under the shelter of that granite rock, set like a

wall against the stormy west, many a good ship rides safe on wild nights, when winds are raging up the Channel, when the foam-flakes sing over the island, and the caverns in the cliff are thundering with the fierce Atlantic surge.

Many a good ship, alas! has made for it in vain, hurried helpless to her doom among fatal sands or still more cruel reefs.

A Royal Commission reported thirty years ago that of all points on the Channel, Lundy Island was the best adapted for the much-needed Harbour of Refuge on this dangerous sea.

There is deep water all round it. The material, too, is all at hand. The cliffs of the island furnish granite well suited for the needful breakwaters. It is twenty years since the works of the company who quarried here for the Thames Embankment were abandoned, and fern, and broom, and heather, since then have done their best to cover up the traces that remain. But better stone than they exported, needing no wax to hide its faults, exists there in abundance.

It is merely a question of expense. Scores of tall ships are lost each year, hundreds of gallant fellows meet their doom for want of a refuge that might easily be paid for by the cost of one first-class ironclad.

But we are nearing land. The iron heart of the little steamer throbs no longer; we are drifting with the tide on a current that rushes by like a mill-race. The dinghy is lowered, and we pull for the beach.

The lightest air from the east makes landing difficult, and now there is a heavy surf along the shore. But by choosing the right moment, and taking advantage of the shelter of a great rock, the boat is run upon the shingle, and we are safe ashore.

The men push off their little craft again and pull back to the steamer. The boat is hauled up, the paddles churn the sea into a flood of foam, the skipper waves a last salute, and we are left upon the empty shore.

There is no sign of life anywhere. Two ancient boats that may have drifted over from the mainland, spars of old ships, and sea-worn timbers high and dry above the tide-mark, might have lain here for ages.

As we pause a minute on the shingle, the solitude and silence are enough to call up memories of marooned sea-captains, of long lonely vigil upon sea-girt rocks.

Over the wide sea is silence—no sail, no cry of bird, no flash of wing. No stir of life along the shore save the dark figure of a drifting cormorant, no sound save the hoarse note of a raven watching from the cliff, and the rhythmic beat of surf along the strand.

On a bold rock, standing like a sentry on the height above, a pile of granite, lichen-draped, brightened with sea-pink and green tongues of fern, a buzzard rests. So still is he, he seems but part of the stone on which he stands.

A herring gull, on broad wings sailing by, catches

sight of the motionless figure, and, with hoarse notes of challenge, deals him a buffet as he passes.

The buzzard, spreading with reluctance his great brown wings, wheels into the air. He has no mind for battle, but his enemy presses him hard with beak and pinion. The two figures, dark and light, rise and fall, and flutter, and wheel this way and that, and then drift screaming round the headland, fighting still.

Now above the low grey coast-line peers the sun.

There is no splendour in the misty sky, no gleam of golden arrows among purple clouds. Only a touch of fire that broadens fast into a round, red shield.

The ripples on the sea are lined in crimson. The piles of rock along the shore, draped with rich brown weed, still glistening from the falling tide, are touched with gold. There is silver on the flashing surf, on the wet slope of pebbles, on the shining line of seaweed that sweetens the cool air of morning with its fragrant breath.

This brief stretch of shingle is the only break in all the coast-line. A narrow way winds upward from the sea, a road that a handful of defenders might hold against an army.

Some points there are, on the far side of the island, where a man may scramble up the rocks, but so well defended by its cliffs is the little islet that 'there is no entrance but for friends.'

This granite rock, from the mainland but a line of cloud along the sea, at most a purple bar against a

sunset sky, in thick weather not seldom altogether lost in haze, has been in its time a very nursery of sea-rovers, a stronghold for the pirates of a thousand years.

Hardy Norsemen anchored here their dark-ribbed keels—perhaps even gave the isle its very name. No runes remain to tell their story, but the plough and the spade have brought to light relics of old frays which may be memorials of their time.

Forty years ago some labourers, in digging the foundation for a wall, laid bare a slab of granite. Beneath it, in a rude chamber framed of blocks of stone, lay a gigantic skeleton, that measured more than eight feet in length. No weapons had been buried with the dead, no ornaments even were discovered, beyond some scraps of bronze and a few beads of pale blue glass. Other skeletons lay near, some arranged with care, others in a mingled mass, as if many bodies had been huddled into a common grave.

Scattered over the island are abundant traces of its old inhabitants—faint signs of ancient tillage, shapeless heaps of stone. The cliffs are pierced with caves and galleries, to which the finger of tradition points as holding still the gold of the buccaneers.

Of the convicts, who under sentence of banishment to Virginia were landed here by Benson in the middle of last century and set to labour on the island, little trace remains beyond rude walls of unhewn stone.

But, from end to end of the island, the bracken

hides the low mounds of old dwellings, the heath is high round ruined towers, from which, perhaps, the pirates of old days watched the slow sailing of deep-laden argosies. Over the granite dykes of ponds long choked with moss and reeds grow cotton-grass and asphodel; and among the fern and ling that hide the ruins of 'The Widow's Tenement,' still her roses bloom.

The steep brow over the landing-place is crowned by the old Marisco fortress, whose lords were long the terror of the sea. Still stands the low square keep of the pirate hold, but in the chinks of its rude masonry the samphire grows. No sentry from its walls looks seaward for the gleam of hostile sails. No warning signal from the turret summons the islanders to arms.

But from the white staff that rises in the court there flutters week by week—brooding like the dove of peace over the robber stronghold—the call to prayer in the tiny church beneath the hill.

Over ruined tower and rampart the sweet lotos blooms; bright blue scabious nestles in the rifted stones.

Far down below lie the pale green waves, fringing dark reefs with hungry foam.

In the hands of resolute defenders this fortress, guarded by steep cliff and stormy sea, must in old days have been all but impregnable.

But force or fraud have found ere now a way up that steep path from the beach. These flowery slopes that stretch away from the outworks of the castle,

where the breath of clover mingles with the fragrance of the thyme, have been trampled by the heels of Spanish captains, who forced the ill-guarded path and plundered the defenceless islanders.

The ports of Devon long remembered the corsair Algerines who moored their galleys in the bay. Over and over again the privateers of France found sanctuary here and made booty of the shipping of the Channel.

Once a French war-ship, with false colours flying, asked leave to bury, in the ancient graveyard on the hill, the body of her captain. The leave was granted. The funeral party came ashore, passed with slow pace up the steep road, and laid their burden down within the church.

Few minutes, however, had elapsed when a body of men, armed with weapons that had been hidden in the coffin, rushed out upon the helpless islanders. Everything of value was taken or wantonly destroyed. Cattle were thrown into the sea, the forts were dismantled, the guns hurled over the cliff.

So runs the story; and still upon the beach there lies a long iron gun that, thrown from the steep brow overhead, for two centuries has rusted in the shingle.

Long since ruined is the ancient church; no trace but the foundation now remains.

But the graveyard round is full to overflowing with grass-grown mounds, nameless and dateless, hidden deep in fern and bramble.

Here through long generations the islanders have laid their weary bones. Here the Marisco lords have brought their dead. Here lay, 'unwept, unhonoured, and unsung,' the body of the recreant knight who brought the noble Raleigh to his doom.

Here, too, by stranger hands committed to the dust, have been laid the wasted forms of hapless mariners who perished on this stormy sea—

'Those for whom
The place was kept at board and hearth so long;
The prayer went up through midnight's breathless gloom,
And the vain yearning woke mid festal song.'

A SEA-BIRDS' HAUNT.

IT is the north end of Lundy.

Among the short heath that purples all the hill, patches of bare grey granite rise, like the brows of ancient cliffs deep sunk amid a sea of green.

There is no sign or sound of man, or beast, or bird, save the sharp note of a stonechat swaying on a spike of foxglove, or the faint cry of a wandering gull, whose white wings float a moment over the shoulders of the hill.

No sound is there even of the sea, that in the soft air of summer sleeps far down about the bases of the cliffs.

A wall of granite bars the way—a pile of worn and lichen-covered blocks, with all their ledges set with yellow hawkweed and pale tufts of thrift.

A narrow pass leads downward through the rocks, and opens—like some gate of magic—on another world.

To right and left lies a broad hollow—a stretch of grass that slopes steeply to the sea, bright with mingled



LUNDY ISLAND

tints of thrift, and heath, and stone-crop, and strewn with blocks of granite, lying broadcast on the ground or piled high like the rude monuments of barbaric kings.

Beyond are wide sweeps of dark-blue sea with pale green shallows foaming white round a low line of reef. And everywhere, on land, and sky, and wave, are myriads of sea-fowl.

It is the sea-birds' haunt.

On every stone stands a group of puffins; the ledges of the cliff are outlined with the forms of innumerable razor-bills and guillemots; scattered over the sea thousands of drifting figures rock idly on the waves.

On the sharp crags that skirt the slope herring gulls are resting. Some rise as you draw near, their broad wings bright against the pallid blue. Their flight is a very triumph of the wing. They float and wheel, and rise and fall with no perceptible beat of their long pinions—only a turn of the glossy head or slight movement of the broad, expanded tail. They sweep slowly by, a few feet overhead, crying with discordant notes that have, at times, a weird suggestion of Satanic laughter.

The herring gull is a powerful bird—a pirate, too, shunned and dreaded by all the lesser toilers of the sea, almost as much even as the raven.

Scattered among the fern and heather of the little glens that break the wall of cliff, many a broken eggshell bears his robber's mark. Many a young

kittiwake has felt the grip of his cruel bill. Hundreds of young puffins he has taken unaware at the mouths of their burrows or snatched up from the surface of the sea.

On the reefs that fringe the shore groups of cormorants are drying their wet plumage in the sun.

From a great chasm in the rocks, a mighty rift with bare precipitous walls running deep into the island, sounds now and then the clamour of a colony of gulls; and, at times, hundreds of kittiwakes, as if moved by common impulse, rise in a cloud from the dark hollow, float like flecks of foam over the sea, and then sink slowly back into the cavernous depth.

In these rocky hollows seals find shelter still, and it is not long since a shepherd-dog was seen barking furiously at a seal, lying on a reef a few yards from shore, who for his part was staring hard at this strange monster of the land. The presence of the shepherd broke the spell. The seal gazed a moment at the man—a form but too well known to all the timid race—and sank down into the sheltering waves.

The whole surface of the water as far as the eye can reach is dotted with figures light or dark, swimming, diving, drifting idly with the current. Far out a white cloud of gulls has gathered over some object floating in the waves.

A few gannets sail over the water, their outstretched necks, slow flight, and pure white plumage singling them plainly out among the motley crowd.

They were once more plentiful here, and in old days formed a source of revenue to the islanders. In an old inventory, dated 1321, we find mention of 'a certain rock called the Gannett Stone, with two places near it where gannetts settle and breed, worth in ordinary years sixty-six shillings and eightpence, but this year destroyed in great part by the Scots.'

The Gannet Stone still bears its name, but it is long since it had any tenants. The birds have more than once been entirely driven from the island, and Lundy gannets have founded one colony, at least, upon the coast of Wales.

A huge pyramid of stone that rises by the shore is crowded with razor-bills and guillemots, and far along the cliff the ledges are lined with countless figures, motionless and silent.

Many of these ledges seem so narrow and insignificant that the eye could hardly trace them, were it not for their dusky tenants.

And not only are sea and shore, and cave and cliff, thus crowded with unnumbered birds, but all the while an incessant stream of flying figures is passing through the air. Every moment puffins emerge from their crevices and burrows and fly swiftly downward with strange moth-like flutter to the sea. Every moment hundreds more come up from the water, carrying fish into their holes.

As you make your slow way down the grassy slope

under the cliff, among the piles of granite, puffins start in scores from the ledges of the rocks.

But when you pause in the shelter of a great block, hoary with its long gray lichens, the birds return to the resting-places from which your coming startled them.

Some of them, perched in little companies on their favourite ledges, have not stirred at all, but allowed you to pass almost within arm's length, without sign of fear.

One particularly pretty group of some fifty puffins has collected on the shelves and ledges of a picturesque pile of granite within a dozen yards.

Nearer still, on a broad stone, hardly two yards away, another company is gathering. One by one the birds drop out of the flying stream and settle down upon the stone. Then walking up to the edge, with steps half dainty, half awkward, they stare at you with odd, reproachful, inquisitive faces.

A sudden rush of wings passes overhead ; a puffin hovers over the rock before you, with legs hanging down as if feeling for the land. It flaps its wings a few times as if to settle its balance, and then takes its place among the little crew of odd, upright figures, half shy, half scared—some with heads turned drolly on one side, that regard you with comical expression.

A shadow falls from the rock overhead. You look up. A puffin is standing just above you, with a fish

glittering in his beak. So near is he that you might almost reach him with your hand.

They are all silent, but their looks and attitudes express, as plain as words could put it, 'When will this tiresome fellow go away?'

Now one stands up to flap his short black wings. Another yawns; a second follows suit. Now one, with great show of deliberation, crouches flat upon the rock, as if he, at least, had made up his mind to make a night of it, and tire the intruder out. Many of them have tiny fish hanging from their beaks, and are, no doubt, impatient to visit their nests, but are uncertain whether it is safe to venture yet.

But as time goes on, and you keep quiet, they gain confidence at last, and one by one they fly down from the rocks to the entrance of their burrows. Pretty pictures they make, as they stand among the tufts of thrift, with their dark backs and snowy breasts, their neat black collars, their brilliant feet, their strangely shaped and coloured bills. One stoops down and peers into his burrow; then he turns to look at you; then he takes heart, and plunges in. Another follows, and another. Ere long your presence is forgotten, and the birds resume their interrupted duties without further sign of fear.

The burrows here look as if they were the work of the birds themselves, whose sharp bills and powerful claws are well suited for mining in this yielding ground. But puffins often make use of rabbit holes, and it is

no uncommon thing for the birds to turn out the rabbits almost to the extent sometimes of a whole warren.

The burrows, though often not more than four or five feet in length, sometimes run in to twice that distance, and either from accident or design are generally so crooked that it is not easy to reach the end. There is usually a bird on guard, too, and a puffin's beak is no toy weapon of defence.

The broad stone in front is only a look-out or a place of meeting, but the birds that crowd the ledges higher up are on the threshold of their dwellings, and have little families hidden away among the hollows of the rocks behind them.

The puffins' eggs are long since hatched, and the young birds, though wearing still their coats of down, are already beginning to come out of their holes and scramble down to the sea.

As you clamber about among the rocks you will hear the cries of the young, and may perhaps discover in a narrow crevice among the granite slabs a member of the rising generation. Near the entrance sits the old bird, her plump figure just filling the fissure; turning up to you her strange, owl-like face, apparently with no thought of fear, anxious only about the safety of that dusky ball of down that crouches at the far end of the crevice.

The mother is not easily caught. She fights hard with beak and claws, whose marks will perhaps remain long imprinted on your fingers.

The young bird makes no resistance, and you are at leisure to note the strange contrast between its sooty coat and the snowy plumage of its parent—to compare, too, the highly-arched and brightly coloured beak of the one, with the straight and undecorated bill of the other; the vivid scarlet of the strong feet of the old bird with the black paddles of its single fledgling.

They are indeed an odd couple. You let them go at length. The young one scrambles down again into its cavern, the mother darts straight as an arrow out to sea, flying fast and far over the water, as if too angry ever to return.

On a ledge close by, on the hard bare earth that time has collected on the rock, lies a great pear-shaped egg, whose white ground is finely decorated with rich brown markings. It is a razor-bill's egg, and in the niches in the rocks you soon discover more.

The birds themselves, who for the most part haunt stations nearer to the sea, are looking down at you all the while, perched in a row upon the rock, and craning their necks to watch your every movement. Fine fellows they are, with their snowy breasts, dark backs, and smart, soldierly attitude.

But as you watch them, their forms are growing faint and dim. A cold wind is blowing up the hollow; and now, hiding fast the sky and sea, veiling the glory of the sinking sun and all the trembling

path of golden ripples that lies along the waves, a rolling sea-fog sweeps fast along the hill.

The groups of puffins vanish in the streaming mist. The rocky stage and all its feathered actors fade behind the cold gray curtain.

But still the voices of the gulls sound ghostlike through the cloud; the chorus of the drifting razor-bills rises faintly from the sea. Still, without pause, there hurries by unseen the rush of innumerable wings.

CHEDDAR CLIFFS.

A RECENT note of warning as to the danger which threatens the beauty of Cheddar has not been sounded a moment too soon. It is true that the actual cliffs are still untouched, but what is being done has already spoilt beyond remedy not a little of their charm. The slopes of rock and stones which harmonize so well with the stern and magnificent outlines of the cliffs are being quarried at intervals from one end of the ravine to the other—here for building, there for lime, everywhere for mending the roads.

One of the finest points of view is already sadly marred, and even if the work should at once be discontinued, it will be many years before the signs of quarrying disappear before the softening influences of time and weather.

Cheddar is a national glory. There is not a finer piece of cliff scenery in the British Islands. Even a travelled American said of it, as he walked up the

grand ravine, 'We have a Yosemite and a Niagara, but we have no Cheddar Cliffs.'

The cliffs, at their base an almost unbroken wall of rock, but separated towards their summits into picturesque masses like towers of Cyclopean masonry, skirt one side of a long, winding ravine—a rift that runs into the very heart of the hills, not, as an old writer says, the work of Nature 'in one of those moments when she convulsed the world with the throes of an earthquake, burst asunder the rocky ribs of Mendip and tore a chasm across its diameter of more than a mile in length,' but slowly sculptured by water, of whose action it bears abundant traces.

The height of the cliffs is often overstated. A late inhabitant who measured them with a line and plummet found the highest point to be not more than 360 feet above the road. But their beauty does not depend upon their altitude; Cheddar is one of those places which never disappoint, and of which no description can surpass the reality.

Beautiful even when trees are bare and skies are grey, when snow lies white along the ledges, and icy fringes glitter in the wintry sun, it is in springtime that the cliffs are at their best; when the foliage that softens all their stern and rugged faces is brightening in the sun of May; when all the thousand tenants are busy round their castles in the air.

Then, in the twilight, wander down the gorge, while the flush of sunset lingers still upon the rocky steeps.

Round the grey pinnacles float the silent, ghost-like figures of the daws. Far above them soaring swifts have still the gleam of daylight on their wings.

Every leaf is still. There is no sound but now and then the clamour of some home-returning troop of birds, or the rustling of a rock-dove's wings as she flutters home to roost.

The weathered faces of rock are in many places too steep and smooth for any but the smallest plants to find a footing; but in the crevices, and especially in the recesses high up among the cliffs, there flourishes a luxuriant growth.

The dark foliage of the yew, the silvery leaves of the white beam, and the varied tints of half a score of other hardy shrubs which, blended in picturesque confusion, have anchored themselves in the shattered buttresses, form, with the cool green of the ivy that clings everywhere in graceful draperies, an exquisite relief among the delicate grey of the time-worn lime-stone.

Not a few flowers, too, find a home upon the rocks. In the summer the frail yellow poppy clings about their feet; abundant wall-flowers scent the air; soft blue harebells nestle in the grass. Sober wood-sage and bright stone-crops wander among the shattered fragments; while on all the ledges and in every crevice the delicate little Cheddar pink, pride at once of the cliffs and the country, shows its tender flush of rose on every buttress of the mighty wall. There is

no fear of exterminating that. It grows mostly beyond the reach of the casual visitor. Maidenhair there is not, and probably never was; but ferns of many kinds fringe the rocky cornices with their graceful fronds.

But the gorge has other tenants. Crowds of jackdaws haunt its rocky niches; and the Babel of their thousand tongues, and the flutter of their dusky wings as they float far up against the blue sky, are for a great part of the year features never absent from it. Among the dark plumage of the daws flash the grey wings of the rock-dove; and the scream of the kestrel every now and then breaks in upon the chattering chorus.

Years ago the lordly peregrine kept his castle with the rest; but both he and the raven, though not unknown, seldom revisit now their ancient haunts.

The limestone of the Mendips is pierced by many caves, some of which, like that of Goatchurch at Burrington, are long and intricate. Despoiled of their beauty long ago, and having yielded rich harvests of bones to Beard, Dawkins, and other cave-hunters, there is little in them now to tempt the explorer.

A better fate has attended the cavern at Cheddar, which, half a century ago, was discovered by accident in digging foundations for a stable. Its treasures have been guarded with such care, that, it is no exaggeration to say, there are few more beautiful caverns in the world than this pride of a little West-Country village.

There are few allusions to the cliffs in old writers, who, indeed, seldom troubled themselves about the

works of nature; Camden makes merely a passing reference to the village.

The earliest mention of the name is probably in Domesday. 'The King,' says the old Norman Survey, 'holds Cedre. King Edward held it. It has never paid tax, nor is it known how many hides there are in it.'

The whole district was a favourite royal hunting-ground both before and after the Conquest. The bare brown uplands, which fringe the summits of the cliffs and reach far over the sterile hills, were densely covered then with noble forests, the haunt of those tall red deer which the Norman King loved as if he were their father.

One of the Saxon Kings nearly lost his life there. Following a stag through the woods, and carried by the heat of the chase close to the perilous verge, he saw both the deer and the hounds, unable to pause in their career, hurled over the edge of the precipice, and himself narrowly escaped their terrible fate.

The dwellers in the white hamlets scattered along the bases of the hills must have been long familiar with the howl of wolves among the wild ravines; and the curfew—still rung in some of these ancient villages—may well have been the signal to the fierce marauders to descend on the defenceless farms.

The face of the country has seen much change since then. The far-reaching moor, that from the mouth of the gorge stretches away until its shadowy rim fades

into the grey horizon—then a swampy wilderness not seldom inundated by the sea, the haunt of crane and bittern; the lair of boar and aurochs—has been drained and tilled.

The forest, except a few dwindling strips of stunted wood, harbour for fox and badger, has long since disappeared.

But the tall cliffs remain. No hand but that of time has yet been laid on these tremendous ramparts. They have seen Kelt and Roman, Saxon and Norman, pass along the road which sweeps like a winding river at their feet.

It is historic ground. Every hill-top is crowned with its earthen rampart; every road follows the course of a Roman way.

At Wedmore, a few miles out on the moor, are the massy foundations of Alfred's summer palace; beyond the low blue hills are still ploughed up, at Athelney, fragments of tiles from the monastery which the great West Saxon King is said to have founded there in gratitude for his deliverance.

Round the grey towers of Wells cling memories of Ken and Still, of Laud and Wolsey.

The noble ruins of Glastonbury are haunted by dim traditions of Dunstan and King Arthur.

Many a bold son of the district faced King James's men down there in the moor.

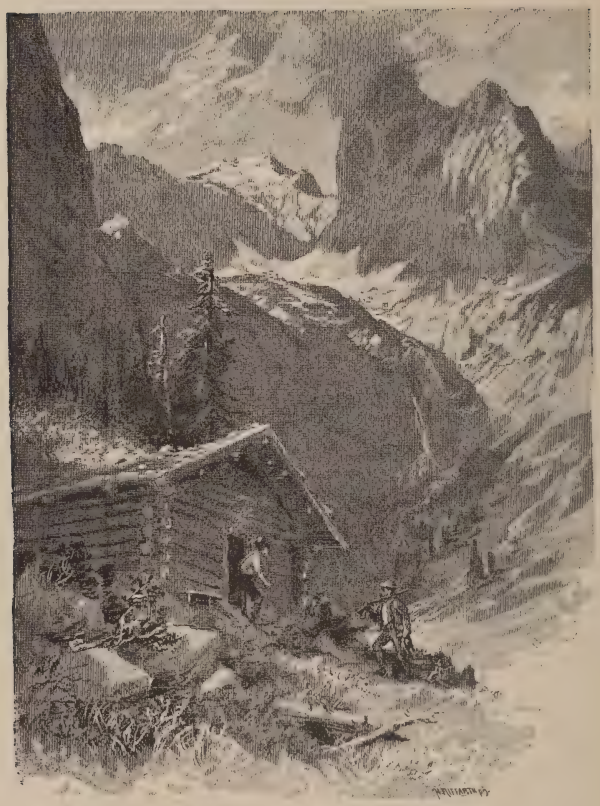
> Along that fatal dyke;
> Where Monmouth's boors, with hearts of proof,
> Kept Churchill's foaming horse aloof;

And scorned to fly, nor deigned to yield,
While, ere he fled the hopeless field,
Flashed their stout leader's pike.

Behind the low hills above the gorge, by the village of Charterhouse, lie the faint vestiges of a vanished town. A Roman settlement was planted there among the Kangic lead-mines. The refuse which their imperfect appliances forced them to leave has been smelted and resmelted since then, and only a few years back the works were still in operation. Few signs are left of either conquerors or conquered. Foundations of buildings have been traced. Fine Samian ware and rude British pottery, coins and ornaments, tools and weapons, have been discovered in 'The Town Field.'

A broken tablet records that the Armenian legion was posted here. Huge blocks of lead still exist bearing the names of Vespasian and Antonine. Little else remains. But, in all the country side

Some trace of Imperial tenure now,
Clashes at times on the peasant's plough;
Fragments of graceful vases
With gods and heroes traced;
Records of Roman triumph
In letters half effaced;
A tarnished ring, whose fiery gems,
Still on its circle set,
From the far sands of Indus brought,
Gleam through their setting, rudely wrought,
As if the sky their hues have caught
Flamed in their glory yet.



IN THE HEART OF THE MOUNTAINS.

RIGHT in the heart of the Bavarian Highlands lies the wild valley of the Höllenthal. It is some way off the beaten track. The nearest village

is three hours away, and there is not a single outlying homestead on the road to it.

Indeed, as we stood under the broad eaves of the forester's house in Grainau, saying 'Good-bye' to the assembled household, our little party had quite the air of travellers setting off for some unexplored region, whose safe return was a matter of uncertainty.

The path lay for some distance through the forest, in which a few beech-trees made a pleasant relief among the sombre ranks of red and white pines. Some of the latter were giants indeed. We counted 228 rings in a fresh stump, and there were other trees, even larger, still standing in their prime.

Emerging from the forest, we followed a narrow path cut in the sides of the Wachsenstein, whose steep flank towered 4,000 feet above us, while beneath lay the magnificent gorge of the Max Klamm—500 feet sheer down.

Although an Alpine climber would make light of it, it is not altogether a path to be recommended for those with a tendency to dizziness. On the day we left the valley ten people who had started together for the Höllenthal were so infected by the nervousness and final collapse of one of the party that they all turned back before reaching the most ticklish point.

Crossing a wooden bridge to the farther side of the Klamm, we could see far below us the boiling waters of a torrent on its headlong way to join the Isar.

Deep into the rock the stream had worn its way,

until now it ran 300 feet below the little bridge that spanned the narrow chasm. The steep sides were covered thick with bright fronds of oak-fern, and nodding plumes of tall spireas. Patches of sweet pyrolas nestled in its sheltered hollows; farther down, spikes of yellow foxglove swayed gently in the wind; clumps of dark purple gentian had found a footing even in this rocky steep.

The track now was less distinct and occasionally difficult; we had to help one of the party by fencing him off from the abyss with an alpenstock held between two.

At last we came down to the stream, and crossing it again by a fallen pine-trunk, found ourselves near the end of our labours. In a few minutes we were well within the Höllenthal.

It is not inaptly styled the Valley of Hell. It is walled in by the steep sides of giant mountains, culminating at the farther end in the huge mass of the Zugspitze—the highest peak in all Bavaria, whose twin summits bar the way like the grim guards of an enchanted land.

On the right the cliff is silvered by the now dwindling waters of the Mariensprung, a fall which ceases, so tradition says, on the Virgin's birthday.

Beyond the fall the mountain-side is bare, precipitous, and inaccessible—except at the head of the valley, where a climb of 2,000 feet leads up to the Riffel, and thence down to the Eibsee.

The left side of the valley is irregularly clothed with pines, and there are patches of forest further on. A great part of the bottom of the gorge is covered by a broad belt of stones—the bed of a great torrent in winter time. In summer there is still a stream fed by the Zugspitze Glacier, but it runs under the stones.

Right before us, at the foot of the pine-covered slope, was our hut.

I suppose that everyone, as he first read the story of Robinson Crusoe, was fired with the desire to go and live on an uninhabited island—to be shipwrecked in preference to any other way of getting there; to go about clad in the quaint costume of that amiable recluse, and armed with guns of ancient pattern but unrivalled performance; and to live all alone in a hut constructed by his own hands.

Here was our chance, then. Here was a log-hut in the very heart of the wilderness, far away from sight or sound of man. In the silence of this lonely valley was a solitude like that of Crusoe.

The hut was built for the use of the foresters of the district, and is like an Alpine refuge, only rather more clean, and dry, and comfortable. There was not much superfluous furniture. There was a stove and sauce-pans; the usual shelf of hay to sleep on; and blankets of the ordinary Alpine colour and pattern—that is to say, black and tattered.

We were soon in possession. In a few minutes a fire was crackling in the little stove; a fatigue-party

went off to the spring for water; and it was not long before we were engaged on our first meal in our new quarters.

The little hinged table just held the bread, the meat, and honey; there was no room for plates if there had been any.

The want of these was supplied by spare pine shingles for mending the roof, which we held on our knees, and changed for the second course by the simple process of turning them over. Our diet was plain, perhaps, but even a queen has been known to have no better fare than bread and honey, whereas we, happy savages in our lonely hut, had that, and bilberry-jam as well. Dinner over, three of us started to explore the valley, while the artist got to work at his canvas.

From a patch of forest further up, we started a stag, that went bounding across in tremendous leaps and up the slope on the left.

High overhead floated a pair of buzzards—dark against the vivid blue—calling now and then to each other as they sailed in vast circles. Once a hoopoe flew by and settled on a dead pine not twenty yards away.

In the trees were crested tits, and black redstarts, and we heard both the nutcracker and the great black woodpecker.

We noticed numbers of a brilliant beetle, a *Chrysomela*, green, with a gold border, on the leaves of the burdock.

It was late for flowers; but there were a few tall gentians and occasional patches of holly fern, with seas of cranberry plants, the vivid scarlet of whose leaves made, with the yellow stains of the lichen, happy touches of relieving colour among the piles of grey rock—the long-accumulated spoils of storm and avalanche.

At the head of the gorge is a waterfall of great height—1,000 feet the foresters say; though its silvery column was but slender now.

When the labours of the day were over, and we gathered round the door in the deepening twilight, there was a cloud upon the brow of the man whose turn it was to cook for the company.

A pot in which he was stewing bilberries for supper had taken it into its ill-balanced mind to topple over, and spill half the precious compound on the floor.

To add to his misery, the tea which we had purchased of an *Apothek* in Garmisch could not be induced, by any persuasion whatever, to impart any colour, to speak of, to the water. He had stirred it vigorously with no effect; in vain had he put in another spoonful; he had placed the teapot on the very stove to no purpose at all.

It was some consolation to him at such a moment to be reminded of Darwin's camp among the mountains, and the 'cursed pot' which 'did not choose to boil potatoes,' and his soul was soothed at length with

the reflection that no man, at such an altitude, could have extracted more colour from the leaves.

Night came on very rapidly. When the sun sank behind a shoulder of the Zugspitze there was a brief but magnificent afterglow that bathed the stern faces of the mountain ramparts with a flood of rosy light.

Then all was cold and grey again; the stars came out all at once; the plash of the waterfalls sounded nearer and more distinct; and an awesome feeling of solitude settled down upon us as we stood silently round the door before turning in.

The shelf on which we were to sleep held four exactly, two at each end.

The distribution of blankets was a matter of some difficulty, from their age and condition; but all were at length satisfied—or at least quieted, and we essayed to sleep. Some hours later we were roused by hail pattering on the roof, and we heard distant thunder rumbling among the mountains.

One night we heard strange noises outside, as of some large animal stamping and knocking against the walls. It was too dark to see anything when we went out, and no doubt the beast, whatever it was, took fright at the first sound of opening the door.

By the middle of the third day we began to have fears of famine. Our appetites had grown to such an alarming extent that the bread was vanishing at a pace we had never contemplated. However, a man who came into the valley to look after some heifers took

back a message to Ostler Toni in Grainau ; and sure enough, at six the next morning, appeared that worthy with a yard of bread on his back ; and more welcome still, some letters—carefully wrapped in two handkerchiefs and a sheet of paper.

The last evening we made a mighty bonfire. Trunks of dead fir-trees in the middle, a huge pile of dry branches round them, a match applied, and in a few minutes the whole mass was a vast pyramid of flames. A wonderful stream of sparks towered straight up into the night. The black fir-trees that stood round like sentinels, and the grey mountain-sides, were lighted up as with a sunset ; and four wild-looking forms seen in the lurid glare might have made a night-o'ertaken wanderer of the Zugspitze think that the valley had earned its name in sober earnest, and that the figures round the fire were kobolds planning mischief for the morrow.



THE HEART OF THE FOREST.

THE Eibsee is one of a group of many lakes which lie scattered among the Bavarian Highlands, and look, from the top of the mountains, like silver studs on the great round shield of the landscape.

When under the deep blue sky of summer the great mountains wear no sign of winter beyond a few white patches that linger in deep rifts here and there, or a scanty glacier that fills some cool hollow at the foot of a precipice, there are few haunts of the wandering Briton more dear to the lover of nature and the follower of art among the wild recesses of these southern Highlands.

The hostelry upon its shore seems like the last outpost of civilization, pushed to the farthest limits of the world.

Close round the broad-eaved chalet gather the dark ranks of pines that like a sea stretch away far up the steep sides of the great amphitheatre that rises round the lake. Above the dark waves of the forest tower the huge buttresses of the mountain wall—ending at last in the rugged majesty of the monarch of the Highlands.

The soft air that steals in at the open windows is heavy with the sweet breath of the forest. From the little balcony you may hear the call of the hoopoe, or see the bright plumage of the oriole flash among the shadows of the trees.

From your window you may watch the shy black woodpecker settle on the topmost bough of a withered pine, whose skeleton arms rise grey and gaunt above its younger comrades. He makes a fine figure up there with his sable plumage and his crimson crown, looking up now and then to utter his long-drawn melancholy cry. Now his call is answered from the

forest ; now he takes wing, and with laboured flight plunges down among the green waves below.

Among the pines on the edge of the clearing, a party of crested tits alight. Clinging with their tiny feet to the brown clusters that hang thick under the boughs, they split off the loose scales from the cones in search of insects, or rummage among the long tufts of grey lichen that drape these patriarchs of the forest. Now climbing among the fir-cones, now swinging head downwards, full of grace and life, they have the busy lively ways of all their race, but they have less to say to each other as they work, and the notes they utter now and then are quite unlike the familiar voices of their more common relations.

There are generally a few black redstarts flitting about among the rocks near the house, and if you keep still they may even alight on the balcony by you as you sit looking out over the landscape.

It is but a few paces from the hostel to the lake.

You make your way down to the water through a group of swarthy mountaineers, who loiter round the doorway. Picturesque of dress and pleasant of speech, they are a turbulent race, these wild dwellers by the lonely lake—slayers of the King's deer, smugglers of contraband goods over the border, at feud with the foresters and the frontier guard.

Round the broken coastline runs a fringe of stones, then a bright green line of grass and ferns, and everywhere a dense growth of pines that crowd to the shore as if to bar the way.

Along the farther side there glides a skiff, across the water floats the beat of oars, and clear and shrill at intervals comes the chorus of a song.

The sounds have ceased. There is silence everywhere, save that from the mountain-side you hear at times the soft plash of a waterfall, or the faint tinkle of a cow-bell from a distant alp.

The soft blue shadows of the pine-trees as you drift along suggest a cool retreat. You ground your skiff on a little beach of shingle, and go ashore into the forest. Tall silver firs on either hand rise like the columns of the green canopy overhead. About their roots is spread a thick carpet of ferns, and moss, and bilberry plants.

At your feet there lies a pool, as green as emerald. The rocky shore, the stately pines, are mirrored in its perfect face. Among the smooth stems of the trees the eye may catch brief glimpses of the dim recesses of the forest.

There is no pathway here, no trace of man. The footprints on the shore are of the roebuck and the heron. The signs of labour are the half-gnawed fir-cones some squirrel has scattered on the ground. Two great dragon-flies, with spots of purple on their rustling wings, poise over the water. No other sound, nor sign of life. It is an enchanted spot. Are there no shadowy figures stealing away into the forest, no dryads peering from behind the trees? It is a place

> Where elves hold midnight revel,
> And fairies linger still.

You climb over the rocky barrier of the shore, and stroll into the forest.

Life is not abundant in a place like this. You may wander for hours and see no living thing.

At last there is a sound of something falling on the withered leaves. From far overhead looks down a black squirrel, whose white breast relieves the inky colour of his coat. He is busy at his dinner, but, if you move a step nearer, he drops his fir-cone and disappears behind a branch. Next moment you catch sight of him in another tree racing like the born acrobat he is, along boughs that hardly bend beneath his tread.

He is gone. The silence is the deeper for his going.

The sense of solitude is almost painful. The great trees divide you from the outer world. The green roof shuts out the very sky.

It is a relief to come upon a little clearing where the pines stand back to make way for the sunshine. The ground is brightened with a touch of colour. Tall yellow foxgloves lift their heads above the ferns; and, among the brilliant flowers of a patch of willow herb, pale Alpine butterflies sun their lovely wings. Across the sky a great buzzard floats, sailing in wide circles, calling now and then perhaps to some comrade beyond our ken.

There is a sudden rustle on the dead leaves. Light footfalls are approaching from behind the rocks. You

crouch closer in the shadows and watch with bated breath as a roe saunters idly down to cool her parched tongue in a little pool among the boulders. She pauses a moment to browse upon a tuft of bracken. She scents no peril in the air ; her great eyes are calm and fearless. She moves nearer ; she is not twenty yards away. Your foot slips off a stone ; it was the slightest movement in the world, but the keen eyes are ware of danger. There is a rush of flying feet ; an eddy of dry leaves, as if caught up by a passing gust, here and there along the slope, and the startled creature has disappeared in the forest.

A few paces further you come again upon the lake, which here thrusts a long arm of silver in among the trees. A troop of nutcrackers are wrangling in the pine-tops, screaming like their brighter cousin the jay, and sailing into the air at times with the grace of a soaring swallow.

As you make your slow way through the tangled undergrowth that skirts the shore, a huge bird breaks from cover almost at your feet with a commotion that makes you stop short in amazement. It is a capercailzie—a noble bird, the prince of forest fowl.

He is just long enough in getting clear of the bushes for you to mark the gorget of rich green upon his breast, his crested head, and the crimson streak over the eye which is the badge of honour of his clan.

He flies straight over the water with a great rush of wings. He is making for the farther shore, and you

watch his figure dwindle in the distance until at last he sinks down among the shadows of the pines.

But it is time to turn back. It is drawing near the hour of sunset, for the horizon here is half-way up the sky. By the time you have got back to the boat and paddled across the lake, the hush of night is already settling down upon the little hostelry. Bold and clear against the saffron west stand the stern outlines of the mountains.

No sound disturbs the silence but the rush of a torrent or the wail of some night-wandering bird.

Suddenly the night comes down. From the dark vault overhead myriads of stars look down into the glassy lake.

Or, after a day of heat and ominous gloom, there descends upon the mountains the terror of a midnight storm. How awful in the still hours of night sounds the loud artillery of heaven! Far through the tossing forest howls the sudden tempest. The rude windows rattle with a great rush of rain. An incessant blaze of quivering light reveals the calm faces of the mountains, looking down unmoved upon the tumult. Along the stupendous cliffs rolls the long roar of the thunder—

> While frighted echoes, in the gorges round,
> Waked for a moment, calling each to each
> With fainter voices, sink again to sleep.

A NEW FACE AT THE DOOR.

ONCE more the sky is blue, the sun is warm. But although rain and wind and misty air are forgotten for a season, the stormy weather has left its mark upon the landscape. Bright days may lengthen out for us the glory of this golden year, but Summer sleeps, no spell can wake her more. A week ago the elms were all untouched by the keen autumn air; the creeper had not scattered on the grass its crimson leaves. The green of the woodlands was the green of summer still. But now along the woodland ways the leaves begin to fall; the needles of the pine are scattered on the path. There is gold upon the leafage of the lime; a ruddy glow is kindling on the rowan. There is a look of autumn everywhere. The hawthorn and the ash are shrivelled by the wind; the flowers are beaten down, the birds are still. Summer was with us but one short week ago, and now—'There is a new face at the door.' Now twilight airs grow keen and cold. There is rime upon the moorland grass; there is snow upon the hills of Wales.

A week ago, the bells in all the country-side were ringing for the Harvest Home; the tents of village festivals were white on many a glebe.

Five centuries, at least, this church has crowned the hill-slope, looking down upon the hamlet. Five long centuries the children of the village, week by week, have gathered in the shadow of its ancient yew. For ages the music of its mellow bells has summoned all its sons of toil, when fields were reaped and sheaves were safe at home, to bow the knee to the Giver of seed-time and harvest, summer and winter.

But never, perhaps, in all its history, has the old Norman church been draped with richer trophies. Never, in the memory of man, has a richer reaping crowned a more generous year. And as they joined with fervent hearts in the thanksgiving, a look of content was on the faces of the farmers that seemed to soften down and smooth away the lines of care, that years of hard times and barren seasons had graven on their rugged foreheads. Yes, it has been a perfect year. In golden weather the rich hay harvest was gathered in. The August rains refreshed the thirsty fields. The first weeks of September, bright and fair, brought no rain to mar the sunshine, no clouds to dim the splendour of the harvest moon.

But in the church, among the ripened sheaves, deft fingers had twined round the old Norman pillars, festoons of bryony hung with dark purple leaves, wreaths of the wild clematis white with winged seeds,

sprays of barberry, tasselled with crimson fruit, boughs of hedge-maple, touched with autumn gold.

It is in letters such as these that Nature loves to write the story of the year, in clear and vivid signs that he who runs may read.

And among the houses of the hamlet, that nestle half-hidden among sheltering trees, are the sounds of the labours of the autumn—the sound of the flail upon the granary floor, the low rumble of the cider-mill; while the scent of the crushed apples hangs heavy on the air, and from distant fields of stubble comes the creaking of the plough.

Not yet, from the orchards, has all the fruit been gathered in.

Still upon the lichened boughs hangs the rich harvest, of russet, and crimson, and gold. Heaped high in the long grass among the trees, piles of bright fruit are ready for the waggon, that even now is brimming over with its fragrant load.

Windfalls, scattered broadcast right and left, shine like fire among the green—apples of Sodom, some of them, for all their beauty, with rough taste that defends them well.

Here the wasps hold high revel among the fallen fruit. Starlings and finches make havoc of the scattered spoil. Rooks, too, are terrible fellows in an orchard, and will make short work of the fruit of any particular tree that may happen to take their fancy.

Perhaps the most destructive visitor ever known

among the apples is the crossbill, whom old writers describe as appearing in great numbers in the time of harvest, and cutting the fruit in two at one stroke of its strangely shaped bill, merely to get at the pips inside; or, as another writer says: 'haveinge a bill with one beake wrythinge over the other, which would presently bore a greate hole in the apple and make way to the kernells; they were of the bignesse of a bull-finch, the henne right like the henne of the bull-finch in coulour; the cock a very glorious bird, in a manner, al redde or yellowe on the brest, back, and head. The oldest man never hearde or reade of any such-like bird.'

The increased cultivation of larch and pine trees since the date (1593) of this inroad has probably turned the attention of the birds elsewhere, for little has been heard of such depredations in modern times.

Beyond the orchard a lane leads towards the hills, a pleasant way, a road seldom trodden by foot of man, marked by wheel-tracks only when, in the late autumn, the bracken-gatherers bring down their loads of brown litter. The steep banks are a very jungle of bramble and fern and travellers' joy. Few flowers linger by the way; a few spikes of agrimony scented still; dark blue scabious and rich purple loose-strife. The great convolvulus still hangs its white bells on the hedgerow, but its leaves are burnt and brown.

Under a broad oak, that spreads green arms overhead, a few grey feathers scattered on the grass show

where, to their feast of acorns, the ringdoves came down, ere a soul was stirring in the village.

Among the old orchard-trees over the hedge there sounds the chiff-chaff's cheery note. Almost the last he is to leave us of all the throng that crossed the seas for a brief summer in the north.

The swallow too still lingers. In a cartshed at the farm below, there is even a nestful of youngsters that have not yet proved the wings that ere long must bear them far to southward, across the burning sands of the Sahara.

From the topmost branches of the oak comes the musical call of a nuthatch, and now and then the sharp tapping of his bill against the rugged bark.

Birds are very silent now. Only the robin sings. Among all the minstrels of the spring-time, we are apt to pass him over. But our ingratitude makes no difference to him ; there is no note of murmuring to mar the beauty of his music.

Other singers come and go ; we listen for a brief space to their sweet melodies, and then, as the days grow longer, we miss them one by one. But the robin's cheerful strain is sweeter now and clearer than when, in the chill March weather, he sang to cheer his mate. All day long he charms our listening ears. One sweet singer haunts the gable of the barn ; another loves the topmost rung of the tall ladder in the stackyard, where, upon the yellow thatch, the silent finches gather in a busy crowd.

The lane opens on a long slope of hill, crowned by grey limestone crags. Broad sheets of sunburnt bracken are outlined by belts of withered grass.

Bright among these sombre tones are the patches of the golden furze. A gracious flower it is for all its armoured stems. Is it not true that

'Kissing is never out of season, when the gorse is in bloom'?

The heather has lost already the splendour of its prime.

But a few flowers still linger on the broad hillside. There is the mountain meadow-sweet, and a late St. John's Wort or two; perhaps a few spikes of sweet ladies' tresses, breathing still their sweet perfume.

High above the slope a kestrel is hovering. The sun is bright upon his chestnut feathers, as on quivering wings he hangs poised upon the air. He pays no heed to a troop of swallows fluttering round him, but scans with keen eyes all the hill, all the spaces among the gorse or ling. Now he swoops nearly touching the ground, but recovers himself, and hovers again. Now, sudden and swift, he falls, and is lost behind the shoulder of the hill.

It is growing late. The rocky brow above, darkening against the saffron west, flings its shadow far down on the bracken at our feet.

A party of bats that have left their shelter, ere yet the sun is down, flutter on dark wings across the glowing sky. From the elms below a woodpecker is

calling. The mellowed voices of the rooks rise faint from distant fields.

Just off the homeward path that wanders down the steep slope of the orchard lies a fallen tree, its ancient stem half hidden among grass and ferns. Strong young branches springing upward arch it over. It is the very

> 'seat beneath the shade,
> For talking age and whispering lovers made.'

No breath of wind sways the long arms of briar and tall plumes of grass that crown the hedgerow. Nothing is stirring but the gnats that hover in the twilight air, tiny feet of timid field-mice rustling in the bushes, or restless blackbirds calling to each other in the thick shelter of the hedges in the lane.

The smoke of a woodman's fire, mingling with the soft vapour that rises from the meadows, steals slow along the distant hill.

Through the mist that veils the far horizon, a line of glory shows for a moment on the cold grey water—the last gleam of the sun—

> 'Like a golden goblet falling
> And sinking into the sea.'

Yonder among the trees shows the white roof of Barton Camp, the shelter of the little colony of waifs that, year by year, are brought by kind hands out of dark corners of the city, to taste the sweet air of the hills, to wander through green fields and pleasant lanes.

The camp is silent now: the birds have flown. They have gone back into the smoke and turmoil of the streets, their young lives brightened by memories of meadow and hilltop, of songs of birds and scent of flowers: memories, perchance, that

> In the sorrow and strife of their after-life,
> Will come back to their hearts in dreams.



HIS NATIVE HEATH

HIS NATIVE HEATH.

AMONG the birds which we reckon on our list as British, there are not a few which, once native here, have with changed conditions gradually diminished in numbers, until being no longer regular residents, they appear now only as stragglers from more settled haunts.

The engineer's level has ever been more fatal to aboriginal races than the long-bow or the rifle. The draining of the fens has been more disastrous to our native birds than the invention of gunpowder.

No longer in the dwindling reed forests is there found a shelter for the tall figure of the crane. The ploughshare and the spade have long since driven the ruff from his haunts among the marshes.

Many birds of prey, again, from long and ruthless persecution, are almost extinct. It is rare to see even a peregrine or a harrier; while the kite and the osprey linger only in jealously guarded sanctuaries.

In the case of the chough, however, it seems difficult to assign any sufficient reason for its increasing rarity.

Its haunts have not been disturbed. It has not been hunted down for its misdeeds by vengeful keeper or exasperated farmer.

But from some cause or other there is no doubt that it has disappeared from many spots where once it was a familiar resident. Along the white cliffs of Dover it 'wings the midway air' no more.

There is hardly a spot along the coast from Kent to Cornwall where now it holds its own.

In Scotland and Ireland there is the same story—the same gradual dwindling away of a bird which appears once to have been common.

No doubt there are nooks along the Cornish coast where this graceful bird still looks down upon the surge that thunders in the caverns far below. And at other points, round Wales especially, there are still unharried haunts from which the chough is not yet driven.

On the Continent of Europe it lives less by the sea, and makes its home among the mountains; and we, too, possess at least one such hill fortress where still the chough breeds undisturbed.

An old miners' path winds down the steep side of the valley to the bank of the river. On either hand are abundant traces of old workings. To the left are heaped huge piles of refuse ore, from these long disused galleries that run deep into the heart of the hills.

Hard, indeed, have the silent slaves of Nature striven to cover up these scars that mar the beauty of

the grand ravine. A hundred plants are spreading bright leaves over the rubbish. Clustering ferns fill with their tender foliage rifts in the shattered rock. Moss grows thick about the mouldering timbers of the galleries whose rough walls are draped with tapestries of living green, glistening with the water that trickles from the dripping roof.

The path crosses the river by a line of ancient stepping-stones, whose dark forms, worn down by centuries of passing feet, are now hardly visible above the brown waters of the swirling stream.

A party of crows, on the watch perhaps for some hapless lamb drifting down the river, fly out of the alders on the bank and alight in a cluster on the branches of a withered tree.

There are few birds in the valley. There is a wagtail pacing with dainty steps along the muddy shore, and a dipper leaves his perch on a boulder in midstream as we cross the stones; but with so few trees and such little cultivation birds are scarce.

The path leaves the river and climbs the opposite slope.

On the broad top of yonder knoll, whose steep sides of rock are overshadowed with a dense crown of oak-leaves, are the grey ruins of an ancient camp. Mere heaps of stones they are, peering out through a wilderness of brake fern and heather. But around them lingers yet the memory of the bold chief whose altered name clings to the historic hilltop.

At a sudden turn in the path a great bird rises from the side of the road, and, spreading wide his mighty wings, drifts leisurely down to the wall under the encampment. It is a buzzard, a bird tamer than many of his fierce race, perhaps because his solitude is seldom broken. And now he lingers until we can see the markings on his rich brown coat. Then at last he rises once more, and we lose sight of him among the trees.

Yonder is another that, floating on motionless wings with every variety of graceful curve, soars in ever-widening circles along the mountain-side until it gains the summit, and disappears over the crest of the hill.

As he passes the grey wall of cliff, whose shattered buttresses break the round swell of the valley, a clamorous party of dark birds emerge from their hiding-places in the rocks. They are choughs. There is little to identify them with certainty at such a distance; but although their flight suggests that of the rook, they are lighter in build, and their clear, emphatic cries of '*Kae*, *kae*,' are quite unlike the voices of any others of their race. They settle down in their rocky haunts again, and are seen no more.

The path has reached the top of the slope, and we stand on the brink of a mighty hollow in the mountains.

It is a wild spot. The ground has been torn up as by a waterspout. Piles of shingle and boulders alternate with yawning hollows made in search of ore.

Here a headlong torrent is brawling in its rocky bed. There a quiet pool mirrors in its silver face its fringe of fern and sedges. Here a patch of heather or a clump of asphodel rises like a small green island in a sea of ruin.

It was not always thus bare and desolate. The broken ground reveals the stumps of gigantic trees, hewn down long ages since, and covered deep with peat and shingle: trees whose wide arms once filled this bleak hollow with fair green waves of forest.

The pathway gains a higher level still, winding among rocky knolls through knee-deep heather that purples all the hill.

On the summit of a grey monolith that lifts its mighty head above a sea of fern there sits an ouzel, presently flying off to higher ground with ringing call-note, answered by a comrade in the distance.

Far up against the sky, just clear of the great peak that now looks down into the valley, floats the figure of a raven, drifting away towards some white object on a distant ridge.

The pathway brings us nearer. It is the body of a sheep, from which three sombre figures rise reluctantly with deep and sullen croak as they leave for a space their hapless prey.

There are more traces of the miners now; ruined cottages, windowless, roofless, dismantled; rude furnaces in which is lying still the half-roasted ore, cold this many a day.

Here, too, after the brief interregnum of man's misrule, re-asserts itself the kindly reign of Nature. Sweet mountain-ferns fringe the widening crannies of the stonework. Beech-ferns cluster about the feet of idle falls that turn no more the useless wheels. Bright stone-crops gild the arches of long empty aqueducts.

But over all there is a sense of gloom and desolation, heightened by the pallor of the sunset and the deepening purple of the hills.

This cavernous tunnel is the entrance of the mine. Heaps of ore are piled about among the ruins. Scraps of rusted ironwork are scattered on the ground. After groping some way along the gallery, whose floor is deep in mud coloured richly by water that has oozed out of the ore, you reach an air-shaft, and pause a moment to look round you. The rock is stained with warm tones of red and orange and yellow. Tiny ferns have found footing on the narrow ledges. Patches of moss mingle their soft shades of green with the ruddy colouring of the rock.

Suddenly the eye catches sight of a bird standing motionless in a niche in the side of the air-shaft, only a few feet overhead. It is a chough. Its glossy black plumage, the bright red of its legs and beak, its little canopy of tinted rock, make a charming study—especially to the naturalist who thus, for the first time, contemplates at his leisure the features of this rare and graceful bird upon its native heath.

Some sound at last disturbs it from its rest. It flutters up the shaft. A comrade, hitherto unseen, disturbed by the sound of passing wings, flies out from higher up, and with a chorus of excited cries they gain the open hill.

They are gone. It is but a brief glimpse that we have had of them. We might easily have 'secured a splendid specimen.'

Better the memory of the twilight in the hills; the well-remembered picture of the sleeping birds, the sound of its unfamiliar voice, and the rush of its vanishing wings, than the possession of its skin mounted by the most dexterous hand—all the grace gone out of it. No more of the free life of the hills; no more triumphant flights across those seas of purple heather. Nothing but to stand for ever behind the glass of an ugly bird-case in the den of a musty naturalist.

A WOODLAND WALK.

THE fierce winds of November have swept away at last the rich autumn foliage that, through the long Indian summer, lingered so late upon the trees.

The elms that cluster in the sheltered hollows are indeed still draped in gay attire, and shimmer in the sunlight like a mist of gold. And the tangle of the underwood, which wears no more the monotonous hue of summer, is picked out with a myriad touches of vivid colour. Tattered sprays of elm and maple whose every leaf is turned to gold still cling here and there, like points of light, among dismantled boughs.

But the green veil that hid so long the mystery of the woodland has fallen, and the eye may wander at will far into the forest sanctuaries.

The paths are covered deep with scented spoils that rustle with each passing tread.

At times the wind, sweeping round a hollow of the road, calls from their rest the coloured leaves that,

whirled up in sudden eddy, hurry headlong down the path like the phantom dance of Pau-Puk-Keewis.

And when for a brief space there streams through rifted clouds a flood of sunshine down the wooded slope, then all at once the pallid greens and yellows on the heads of oak and elm, all the bright colours of the thickets, glow as in the light of dawn. The splendour brightens even the sombre foliage of the firs and kindles on their ruddy branches with the sheen of gold.

The dwellers in the woodland, too, the light-hearted elves that chatter in the tree-tops, raise their voices above the rattle of the boughs and the rustle of dead leaves, to welcome back the lost glory of the summer.

A creeper, gliding mouse-like up the stem of a reeling ash-tree, searching the crevices of the bark for insects as he goes, puts new strength into his feeble note.

A troop of coal-tits start a ringing measure as they swing among the firs.

An oxeye, too—a smarter fellow than his sober-coated cousins, with his yellow vest and black facings —chimes in with his musical refrain, and for a minute or two the merry chorus recalls the opening days of spring.

High up in an elm-tree, from which the screen of leaves has fallen away, is a woodpecker's hole. It is long since the little family climbed out into the world, and, holding on tight with crooked claws, wandered

among the branches until their wings were strong and they gathered courage to launch out upon the yielding air. But the hollow may be occupied still by the old birds, for here in the heart of the greenwood starlings are less likely to have taken possession.

Yonder flying figure is perhaps one of the tenants. He is coming this way. After a few quick beats of his powerful pinions he closes his wings and sweeps along with undulating flight, the last wave of which brings him up to the stem of an old elm, where for a moment he clings, silent and watchful, ere he begins to beat the covers of what is no doubt a familiar hunting-ground; for sheets of bark stripped off and ragged holes in the wood show that this is by no means his first visit to the place.

How still he is! That, indeed, is the first rule of woodcraft, as every naturalist has to learn. It is little that he will see of life in the greenwood who canno in that respect copy the children of the forest.

The path gains the crest of the hill, and winds down the farther slope between lines of noble trees, whose dishevelled tresses strew the stony way. A few bright leaves still cling about the Spanish chestnut boughs, and flicker in the wind like flames.

On a branch that leans out over the path crouches a squirrel, watching you with all his eyes. He wears his winter coat, warmer and thicker than his summer dress, with an added dash of grey in it, and with long tufts upon his pointed ears.

There is slight cover for him now among the rocking tops, but he is a master of woodcraft, and, like the woodpecker, knows well that cardinal rule of keeping cool and quiet. Nine times out of ten you may pass him by unnoticed, although the bright black eyes may be but a few feet overhead. He is often discovered more by sound than sight; for if you keep still for a few minutes in the wood you may often hear the noise of the fir-cone chips that he drops from his dinner-table; and by following the sound you may at last distinguish among the branches his bushy tail and his rich brown coat.

He may take fright if you approach too near, and, scurrying up the trunk, will pause perhaps on a higher level to stamp his little feet or bark with comical gestures of indignation at your intrusion on his privacy. Then from bough to bough he leaps, with marvellous ease and grace, disappearing at last in his snug home in the depths of a sheltering fir.

Seen from below, his nest might well pass for that of a magpie, but it is built more of moss than of sticks, and sometimes seems to have no visible entrance whatever.

Here for more than half the year the young squirrels stay with their parents, until the time when they have gained sufficient confidence to set up housekeeping for themselves.

The squirrel is a vegetarian as a general rule, but was observed by Darwin to feed on the grubs of oak-

galls ; and there is strong evidence that he is a poacher on occasion, devouring not only eggs, but young birds.

Somewhere in the rift of an old stump, or in a little cave among the twisted roots of some tall beech-tree, he has his stock of acorns laid up against the hard times coming on.

Not only do mice and squirrels hoard in this way their nuts and beech-mast, but even moles are said to provide against the difficulties of a frosty season by storing earthworms in a hollow in the ground.

A stone near the squirrel's tree is strewn with broken shells, but that is not his work. His traces lie about in plenty on the ground in the shape of gnawed fir-cones. No, this great flat stone, sunk deep among the moss and leaves, is a sort of stone of sacrifice where all the thrushes of this corner of the wood bring snails, to crack them for their dinners.

You may often hear the 'tap, tap' among the bushes. Not the sound of striking wood ; no woodpecker or tit, nothing like it ; but a sound that finishes with a crash, and is followed by a moment of silence, as the bird swallows the kernel, so to speak, of his plunder.

Still lower winds the pathway. And now, above the deep voice of the pine-trees comes another sound —a sound that rises no higher as the wind blows hard, nor pauses in the intervals of calm.

It is the murmur of the sea. Now through the

leafless branches come glimpses of the bay: the long sweep of yellow sand, the low promontory with its skirts of black and broken rocks, the rugged sand-hills covered thick with tall, grey sedges, the wandering line of the old sea-wall, and the green levels of the moor.

The tide is out. Over the wide mud-flats, brown by the brink of the angry sea, tinged with purple nearer in, and lighted here and there by steel-like gleams of water left in the long hollows, wander troops of waders. Even at this distance one can distinguish the long bill of the curlew; the black and white plumage of the oyster-catcher. Gulls driven ashore by the rough weather are scattered in hundreds over the mud; some of them are even foraging like rooks in the meadows of the moor.

Out on the rough water, their dark figures rising now on the crest of a wave, now hidden altogether by the swell, ride a fleet of scaup ducks. Winter visitors they are, from the far and frozen North. They are splendid fellows, with their dresses half of glossy black, half of pencilled grey, but so shy and so well acquainted with the speed of a boat and the range of a fowling-piece that it is no easy matter to get near enough to see them well.

Round the grey tower of the little church under the hill cluster the white cottages of a straggling hamlet, once, as its name implies, a place of boats.

A flight of rude stone steps crossing the footpath

farther on led from the little port up the steep brow to the great stronghold whose ruined walls and moss-grown outworks wander far among the thickets of the hill.

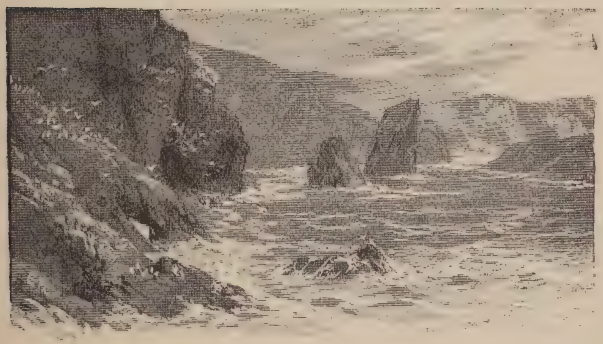
It is a fortress such as crown so many of the heights of Mendip, guarding the long line of road from the distant lead-mines to the sea.

Among this tangled underwood the eye may still discover the pit-dwellings of the old inhabitants, who perished when Ceawlin stormed these border strongholds, may discern among the charred remains of their ruined homes some relics of the vanquished—here a rusted spear-head, there a hoard of blackened corn; now a bead of quaint device, perhaps even a Phœnician ring.

Here, too, beneath broad arms of bracken buried deep, have been found the grim memorials of desperate fray—bones of forgotten heroes, scarred with sword and war-axe, lying where they fell, above their burnt and plundered hearths.

It was the debateable country, the border-line between the races, and in all the country-side there is no hilltop but has its lines of earthworks, its legends of old fight, its barrows of the unremembered dead.

WHEN THE WIND BLOWETH IN FROM THE SEA.



THE strong winds that swept the lingering beauty from the woods still sway the branches. Day after day the storm-signal swings from the white staff on the hill. Day after day comes in an angry sea, strewing fresh heaps of weed along the shining sands, and tearing new gaps in the coastguard path that, marked by heaps of whitened stones, wanders along the brink of the crumbling cliff. Day after day, about the lonely cottages nestling close under the steep shore of the cove, the air is filled with flying foam, the white wings of sea-birds, and the thunder of the surge.

To the watcher looking seaward there seems at times to come a lull in the mad plunge of the landward rushing breakers.

Then far out there rises a great green billow that rolls in under the shore; pauses a moment as if to measure its might against the calm brows of the cliff that looks down unmoved on all the tumult; then hurls itself at the land, leaping far up the steep, in clouds of spray, and, falling back, melts into a hundred tiny rivulets that silver with their white tongues all the dark crannies of the rock.

What a hungry sound there is in the rush of the foam, as the fierce waves thunder up the shingle! With what a rattle and a roar of pebbles each wave, after spreading out in a smooth and creamy flood, draws back before returning to the charge!

On the right of the cove are heaped high wild masses of serpentine, divided in some cases by straits so narrow that it seems a light thing to leap across; but more than one adventurer has missed his footing on the slippery verge, and perished in the boiling surf of that cruel chasm.

The warm red colouring of the rock is relieved by a hundred touches of scanty vegetation—patches of thrift and stains of lichen, and varied by mazy lines of white stone that wander through the heart of the rock.

Far away to the left sweeps the broken coast line, range after range of dark, stern headlands, and then, running a long way out to sea, is a chain of reefs over

which there leap every now and then white sheets of spray.

And all across the restless water, grey on the sea-line, blue in the nearer distance, then pale green, with bands of purple over beds of weed, 'The wild white horses foam and fret.'

As the tide goes down, the narrow strip of hard, bright sand that fringes the bay and wanders among the outlying piles of rock, is strewn with spoils from the dark forests of the sea—strong, pliant stems of kelp with waving fronds of deep olive, their twisted roots still wrapped close about the sea-worn stones they have brought up from their lost moorings, bright ocean weeds of green and crimson, lying like patches of vivid colour among the pebbles.

Here, a score of painted shells have been stranded in a crevice, and not yet beaten into fragments on the stones.

There, has floated in the broad white 'bone' of a cuttle-fish, its fragile shape hardly injured by its stormy voyage. A few holes in its underside show where some sea-bird has made trial of its soft substance and left it, disgusted at its dryness.

A couple of turnstones, smart little birds in brown, with bright red legs and beak, are busy on a heap of kelp over some treasure-trove that the sea has left for them.

Very pretty they look against the dark background of the weed, but perhaps even prettier is the rich violet

colouring of the shells they have been breaking on the pebbles. No natives of the coast are these. They are waifs from the Atlantic, argonauts drifted by the long-continued gales far from their ocean rest, and stranded here on this unfriendly shore.

In their home in mid-ocean they live chiefly at the surface, buoyed up by a kind of raft. This raft, which is among the most wonderful of natural objects, consists of a membrane extending from the mouth of the shell, like an unusual development of the little valve that closes so tightly on the domestic arrangements of the periwinkle. On the underside of the raft hang, in a sort of fringe, the creature's eggs, which remain there until they are hatched.

This *Ianthina* is a singularly helpless sailor. It has little control over its movements; it is without the power of sight; it drifts aimlessly at the mercy of the waves.

But not only does the stormy weather strew the sand with weeds and shells; it drives the sea-birds to seek shelter by the shore.

The ledges of the cliffs, as far as the eye can reach, are white with gulls, whose snowy plumage rivals the very foam which some higher wave than usual scatters over their ranks.

Less noticeable are the sombre cormorants that, sheltering in deep niches round the sounding caverns under the cliff, are darker even than the dark rock that leans out over their heads.

All the air meanwhile is crowded with flying gulls, beating up against the wind—now hovering above some waif floating in the water; now swooping down to dip the surface; now rising with a fish that shows a moment as a gleam of silver in its captor's beak.

It is a mingled crew that fights its way against the gale. These, by their slight figures and their delicate garb of white and lavender, are kittiwakes.

Yonder great bird in brown is a herring-gull: not until his fifth year will he change his youthful dress for perfect plumage.

Here comes a black-headed gull: not black-headed now, and wearing but a single spot of that neat dark hood that will appear all at once in the spring.

He is struggling hard against the wind. Now he hangs motionless a moment; now he sails in swift and graceful curves across the wind; now he dips towards the water, followed in an instant by a score of eager screaming comrades.

Now he gives in to the gale, and in a moment is swept a hundred yards down the wind. But, undismayed, he still holds on, and before long has fought his way in shore again, and now settles down on one of the crowded ledges, whose tenants greet the newcomer with a sort of querulous chorus.

Now a herring-gull drifts over, a full-grown bird this time, so near that we can see not only the spotless purity of his breast and the black tips of his wings, but the white of his keen eyes and the red stain upon his

yellow bill. He turns his smooth head this way and that, keeping sharp look-out on the seething water; his whole frame quivers with the beats of his strong wings. He pauses a moment just overhead, and then, falling back, he too is swept unresistingly away.

Some forty yards from shore, now skimming the rough crest of a breaker, now lost in the trough of a wave, and evidently quite in his element in this war of waters, is a much less familiar figure than herring-gull or kittiwake—a little dark bird whose flight and figure are suggestive of a swallow.

It is a stormy petrel, a real sea-rover, whose whole existence, except for the brief space of the breeding season, is spent out of sight of land. At other times, only a long spell of rough weather brings it off the sea.

Modern science has dispelled the mist of fable that so long obscured the life-history of this little bird. No longer is it looked upon as a herald of the storm; probably not even in a forecastle yarn is it said to hatch its eggs under its wings.

There are many spots round the coast, especially in the north, and in outlying islands, where in the early summer the petrel comes ashore to lay, in a crevice in the rock, or in a burrow in the sand, her one large egg; but as she is nocturnal in her habits, leaving her nest only when other birds retire to roost, she is even then but seldom seen.

Were there any truth in the weird legend which sees in the stormy petrel the wandering spirit of some

drowned mariner, the bird well might haunt this fatal shore. Every reef has its record of disaster; every headland its tale of wreck and ruin.

Beyond the twin towers, that send their white shafts of light far out over the surge, stretch long lines of nameless graves.

Still, on the beach to northward there shine at times among the shingle, after heavy gales, the sea-worn dollars from a Spanish treasure-ship whose freight of silver rests beneath the sand.

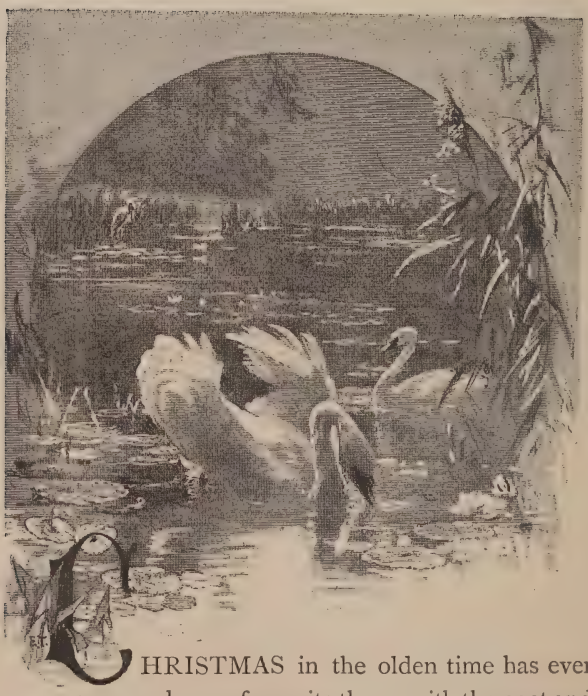
The fishermen still hear in fancy, in the pauses of the storm, the crash of timbers, and the shrill despairing wail, where, long years ago, a great transport sank with all her crew.

There is no winter but adds something to the record; hardly a tide but drifts into these

> 'Sheltered coves and reaches
> Of sandy beaches,'

some message from the sea.

THE BIRD OF YULE.



CHRISTMAS in the olden time has ever been a favourite theme with the poet and the painter; but, like many another ideal of the good

old days, much of its merit was, to say the least of it, shadowy and unreal, and comes down to us

> 'Magnified by the purple mist,
> The dusk of centuries and of song.'

The Christmas of our day, if it has in it less of revelry, has gained by what is lost, and is honoured in a better, calmer spirit than in Yules of bygone years.

The very festival is other than it was ; other viands are chosen for the banquet. The boar's head that we so often associate with the Christmas of our fathers went out with the Long Parliament. The crane and the bittern are found no longer on the Royal table. No directions for the treatment of a swan or a heron occur in modern cookery books.

This has not been entirely an affair of taste. Various causes have contributed to bring about the change.

By the time that Yule-tide revels were revived after the Commonwealth, the wild-boar had disappeared from the forests.

Of the birds whose names are common in the ancient bills of fare most have left the country.

Driven from the island by the destruction of their ancient haunts, they visit us now so seldom, that their coming is to the ornithologist a matter of mark beyond the politics of Europe.

Six centuries ago cranes built their rude nests by hundreds among the reed-forests of the Fens, and the

bird long formed a Christmas dish on the table of the Sovereign.

Three hundred years later there was still a statute for the protection of its eggs, but since that time, as mere and marshland have been drained and tilled, the crane has retired before the conquering share.

Now, like the great bustard—the story of whose banishment is of much later date—it is an exile and a stranger.

Of other birds that found favour in Tudor times, the heron and the swan still hold their ground. The latter, now only a visitor, has long ceased to make its nest with us, but its flying visits are neither few nor far between.

The former is a resident still; more than a hundred heronries remain scattered up and down in England, and there are few low-lying shores where herons do not stalk in stately fashion by the falling tide like the ghosts of vanished friars.

The swan is seldom killed for the table—less perhaps from its demerits than its rarity.

The heron, on the other hand, except when young, and doctored with powerful condiments, has a rank and fishy flavour, and its disuse as an article of diet and its removal from the game list must be regarded as marking an improvement in the national taste.

The bird of Yule of our time has no such history to look back on. Somewhere about the middle of the sixteenth century, while the crane and the bustard were

still taken for the Royal table, the turkey began to supplant our native wildfowl, and rapidly acquired almost a monopoly of popular favour.

The actual time of its first importation is involved in obscurity. Its very name shows how little was known of its origin.

Thus much is clear. The turkey was brought from North America by Spanish explorers. From Spain—then in constant communication with England—it made its way into this country, and caught the popular fancy like the fragrant weed railed on in the Royal 'Counterblast.'

A writer of the time of James I. remarks that 'those outlandish birds called Ginny cocks and Turkey cocks' were not seen in England before 1530. Hakluyt, too, writing near the end of the sixteenth century, speaks of the turkey as having been known in this country for fifty years.

It is also clear that the epithet turkey was at first applied indiscriminately to this bird and to the guinea-fowl, which reached England about the same time by way of Levantine ports.

The confusion between the two birds is well illustrated by a passage in an old Spanish dictionary, where *gallipavo* is defined as 'a turkey or guinea cock or hen.'

The tame turkey of America was probably a re-importation from Europe. The original wild species, which still inhabits the whole continent east of the

Rocky Mountains, from Panama to the north of Canada, far surpasses the domestic breed both in size and in the beauty of its plumage. Audubon writes of wild turkeys of thirty and forty, and even alludes, though somewhat doubtfully, to a monster of sixty pounds' weight.

The weight of the famous bird which Scrooge declared would need a cab to carry it to Camden Town is not stated in pounds. Perhaps it is merely a question of resistance of material to find how much it would take to snap a bird's legs 'off short like sticks of sealing-wax.'

The festival in which the penitent figure of Dickens's pleasant story played so prominent a part is honoured again to-day by all sorts of men under all sorts of conditions.

In lonely outposts high up among Himalayan snows, on the wild waves of distant seas, on the fringe of the New Zealand bush, under the fierce Australian sun, men to-day will lay aside for a brief space the thought of danger and the race for wealth, to dream of home, and kin, and far-off firesides that for them may never brighten more.

In many a jovial circle here at home will be read and re-read the ever-welcome story of those midnight visitors, that to the reluctant Scrooge played the part of ministering angels.

Never was the touch of the master brighter or better

than in his pictures of song, and mirth, and revelry, round the branches of the Christmas Tree.

And the pathos of his tender story may well soften our hearts as we watch the red tongues leaping high about the logs of Yule. It was a pleasant fancy that all jealousy and mistrust, and memory of bitter words, passed in the flames of the Christmas fire.

There is ever a vein of sadness in the midst of mirth. In many an eye a mist will gather in thinking of the vacant chair:

> 'A narrowing circle, year by year,
> Draws round the hearth on Christmas Day.
> Ah me! for faces kind and dear,
> Dispersed through regions far away,
> Or passed unto that shadowy shore
> Whence never echo travels o'er.'

These are hard times. In many a dark and desolate home there will be no Christmas cheer, no roaring log, no lighted tree. And among the happy and light-hearted who gather round the board to commemorate this, the fairest day that ever dawned on suffering, sad humanity, those who out of the fulness of their festal cheer can feel that they have lighted the cold hearth and gladdened the heavy heart of one single sorrowful, struggling fellow-mortal, will find their own joy the sweeter, and their roaring Yule log brighter still, for thinking of the outcast and the orphan, for the hand held out to the widow and the fatherless; and though

for us no guiding star lights up the winter midnight, still there sounds for all the message of the angels—

'Oh, brother, wouldst thou hear the strain?
Let go the lust of gold;
Let go the passions fierce and vain;
Let go the sins of old.
Thine eyes shall see, thine ears shall hear,
God and His angels hovering near.'

THE END.

Elliot Stock, Paternoster Row, London.

By the same Author.

NOW READY, THIRD EDITION.

Tastefully printed in crown 8vo., and bound in cloth, gilt lettered, price 5s.; or with gilt edges, 5s. 6d.

BY LEAFY WAYS:

Brief Studies in the Book of Nature.

With numerous beautiful Illustrations by E. T. Compton.

CONTENTS.

TENANTS OF A SEASON
A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD
THE PROMISE OF MAY
A RIVER PATH
BY LEAFY WAYS
A RISING GENERATION
A COLD-BLOODED RACE
BY QUIET WATERS
AS EVENING DARKENS
A PARADISE OF BIRDS
SABRINA FAIR
ALL AMONG THE BARLEY
THE MISTY MOORLAND
FOOTPRINTS ON THE SANDS
THE PARTING GUESTS
FLYING, FLYING SOUTH
THE RETURN OF THE FIELDFARE
THE SUMMER OF ST. MARTIN
A GREAT FREQUENTER OF THE CHURCH
SYLVAN MINSTRELS
WINTER VISITORS
ADAPTED PLUMAGE
OUTLAWS
SOME BIRD MYTHS
WHEN WOODS ARE BARE

A few Large-Paper Copies are still on sale, handsomely bound, price 21s. each nett.

Some Opinions of the Press.

'One likes to fancy how Gilbert White would have welcomed Mr. Knight had they been contemporaries, and of the talks they would have had together. He would have found a man after his own heart—full of pleasant chat, deeply versed in all the latest literature, gifted with a brilliancy of expression such as the old author never aimed at, even supposing he could have attained it.'—*Academy.*

'Mr. Knight seems to be quite as attentive and sympathetic an observer as the late Mr. Jefferies, and there is much in his essays which is both instructive and eloquent.'—*The Globe.*

'A charming book on Natural History, beautifully illustrated, and full of delightful reading. Dealing chiefly with bird life, the work also contains much information about the denizens of English lanes, woods and meadows, written in a very pleasing and agreeable style.'—*Newcastle Chronicle.*

'Mr. Knight has a happy touch in describing the ways of birds and the aspects of the fields, and has a keenness of observation akin to the faculty that was so remarkably developed in the "The Gamekeeper at Home."'—*Scotsman.*

'Not the least important feature of these studies is to create a love for all the lower forms of life by showing their usefulness in one particular or another. The book is very beautifully illustrated by Mr. E. T. Compton, and also by photogravures of delightful bits of scenery.'—*Stockport Advertiser.*

LONDON: ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

Boston Public Library
Central Library, Copley Square

Division of
Reference and Research Services

The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library.

Please do not remove cards from this pocket.

(June, 1889, 20,000)

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

One volume allowed at a time, and obtained only by card; to be kept 14 days (or seven days in the case of fiction and juvenile books published within one year) without fine, not to be renewed; to be returned by messenger after 21 days, who will collect 20 cents for each of the first 7 cents a day, including Sundays and holidays; not to be lent out of the borrower's household, nor to be transferred; to be returned at this Hall.

Borrowers finding this book mutilated or unwarrantably defaced, are expected to report it; and also any undue delay in the delivery of books.

***No claim can be established because of the failure of any notice, to or from the Library, through the mail.

The record below must not be made or altered by borrower.

OBSOLETE.